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## Breaking the Genius Myth

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Bard

# **Breaking the Genius Myth**

Henri Bergson and musical intuition

Senior Project Submitted to  
Foreign Languages, Cultures, and Literature  
**of Bard College**

by  
Chaojun Yang

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York  
May 2018



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I write with passion and love.

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To Xueren, Julie and their Yang Yang





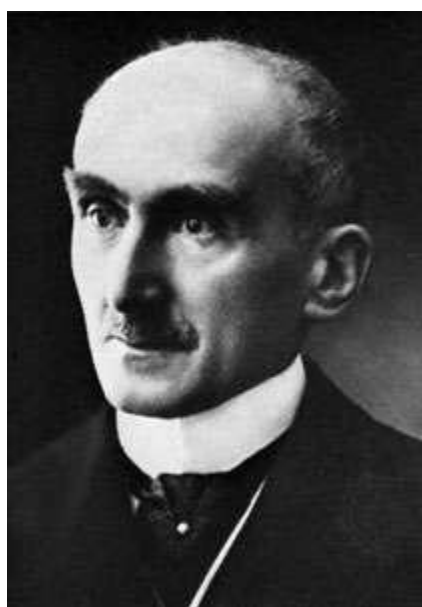
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## Introduction

It is unquestionable that the artworks of geniuses required tremendous work and effort. The necessity of working is common knowledge, regardless of the fact that audiences or viewers from outside often indulge themselves in their wishful thinking that the lights of genius are brought from heavenly elements rather than deeply rooted earthly labor. It is quite understandable, since when appreciating an artwork and being touched by it, one simply would just want to appreciate the miracle of life. However, the efforts artists have gone through in order to create such works, sometimes can be torturing, or even physically and mentally infernal, and indeed is far away from the impression of natural spontaneity displayed in their artworks. The public either does not recognize the effort of hard work at first sight, or else the geniuses try their best to hide this effort. Just like the coolest kids in school wouldn't study much, yet nevertheless got straight As. Our tendency of choosing to ignore the torture behind the easiness, is similar to our appreciation of magic, where we hesitate to step in to decipher the secret as an expert, because we want to allow ourselves to have the opportunity of being surprised. In fact, we might never really cease to long for supernatural forces, which fail to be understood by our intellect. Although it is common knowledge that the amount of time devoted to work is the most fundamental, and the most important factor to gain basic skills. As we are constantly reminded of this by famous people, such as the Comte de Buffon who once said: "Genius is only a greater aptitude for patience"(Voyage à Montbar);<sup>1</sup> Thomas Carlyle who put it that: "Genius' means

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Martin, Gary. "The meaning and origin of the expression: Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration." *Phrasefinder Website*.

<<https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/genius-is-one-percent-perspiration-ninety-nine-percent-perspiration.html>> [Accessed April 29, 2018.]

transcendent capacity of taking trouble, first of all”(History of Frederick the Great).<sup>2</sup> Yet audiences and outsiders are still nevertheless tempted to build a connection between some innate qualities dwelling inside artists and their artwork. For instance, if the artwork is dark, and suggests many powerful or infernal elements, it would be associated first with the artist’s own personal charisma, instead of appreciating his “effort of working”, “patience” and “taking trouble”. How boring, unpoetic and dull this audience is if so!

If audiences, amateurs, or outsiders like to indulge themselves in a genius fantasy, then professionals easily fall into another trap, at the other extreme, where they are drowned by techniques, analytical methods and details. The dedication for working hard is not so hard to find in professionals, and thus the right way of working becomes the secret for elites in the field. A powerful artwork can only be created, not when the artist is born powerful, for so many of his fellow men might potentially be just as powerful as him, also equally not when the artist has spent twenty-four hours to work, for factory workers in modern days might only suffer the danger of turning into machines instead of artists by working more, but a powerful artwork is born only when artists know how to make the right efforts for their art. “I know of no genius but the genius of hard work”(Notes by Mr Ruskin on His Collection of Drawings by the late J. M. W. Turner).<sup>3</sup> Just as John Ruskin has commented, all geniuses are in fact, not the geniuses of their final artworks, but the geniuses of their working process. And although this relationship between genius and work has already become a platitude, since the very connection between the two reveals the secret of art making, it is forever worthy of discussion and ponderation.

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<sup>2</sup> Martin, Gary. “The meaning”, *Phrasefinder Website*.

<sup>3</sup> Martin, Gary. “The meaning”, *Phrasefinder Website*.

The hard working spirit at once reminds me of the Shokunin spirit (**Kanji**:職人) of the craftsmen that dominated in Japanese, and ancient Chinese culture. Growing up, I was no stranger to this spirit which unifies dedication, persistence, passion and a pure beginner's mind all in one towards the job one is doing. For craftsmen, their job is often repetitive, like what is demonstrated in the documentary *Jiro dreams of Sushi*: "the techniques we use are no big secret. It's just about making an effort and repeating the same thing every day".<sup>4</sup> This emphasis on persistence on one's work, even when it is repetitive everyday with simple things, did not however make Jiro Ono, the sushi chef, and his apprentice fall into the cycle of boredom described by Schopenhauer.<sup>5</sup>

Annie Dillard has argued that Schopenhauer's cycle doesn't seem to apply to meditation. Because meditation is, in her words, "prioritizing presence over productivity".<sup>6</sup> The sensory satisfaction might be "finite in its attainment and thus destined for the crucible of boredom", but in the pursuit of spiritual satisfaction: "boredom is our comrade rather than enemy, the necessary stillness-ground of contemplation reels us back from our compulsive business of doing and into a deeply present state of being".<sup>7</sup> Dillard's mysterious "deeply present state of being", which can conquer Schopenhauer's pessimistic existence, seems quite powerful. In fact, this might resonate with Jiro's case. Whether it is making sushi for Jiro, or it is meditation for Dillard, the distinct

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<sup>4</sup> *Jiro Dreams of Sushi*. Directed by David Gelb. Magnolia Pictures, 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Schopenhauer suggests men are consistently in the cycle of desire--satisfaction, and finally boredom. If there is no constant obstacles to be overcome, or if the boredom is not "immediately followed by fresh needs", men would be "thrown back on existence itself, [and] are convinced of the emptiness and worthlessness of it; and this it is we call boredom". This boredom would remain there until fresh desire aroused. See Popova, Maria. "In Defense of Boredom: 200 Years of Ideas on the Virtues of Not-Doing from Some of Humanity's Greatest Minds, Bertrand Russell, Søren Kierkegaard, Andrei Tarkovsky, Susan Sontag, Adam Phillips, Renata Adler, and more." *Brain Pickings*.  
<<https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/03/16/boredom/>>. [Accessed April 29, 2018.]

<sup>6</sup> Popova, Maria. "In Defense of Boredom", *Brain Pickings*.

<sup>7</sup> Popova, Maria. "In Defense of Boredom", *Brain Pickings*.



difference between them and these factory workers or sad housewives who fall into Schopenhauer's cycle, is that the former remain alive under a surface which might look still or repetitive. The key here is the aliveness. Through the process, they are embracing and experiencing their essence and meaning of life. While for factory workers, things turn out to be not so healthy because by facing the machine all day long, oftentimes one is merely being automatic. Thus humanity has reduced its vital energy by a mechanistic and repetitive approach to work.

Viewers feel strongly while watching *Jiro, dream of sushi*, that making sushi for chef Jiro is not simply a job to earn a living: "I do the same thing every day, improve bit by bit. I will continue to climb, trying to reach the top, but no one knows where the top is. Even at my age, after decades of work, I don't think I have achieved perfection. But, I feel ecstatic all day, I love making sushi." Later he commented that "this is the spirit of Shokunin". Driven by passion, concentration, persistence and dedication, craftsman spirit made Jiro able to be alive, and grow in the work he does. It is a journey for him like mountain climbing, with each day constituting a step toward the summit. He and his apprentice "don't care about money", "are not trying to be exclusive or elite". Their purified purpose enables them to only concentrate and stick to the simple work every day, which gives substance to Comte de Buffon's saying that "genius is only a greater aptitude for patience". It is this patience, pure concentration, makes them alive in work, liberates them from other cravings for fresh need elsewhere, as Schopenhauer would suggest. For all Shokunins, a pure heart with dedication and persistence, turns their process of working itself into art. And the essence of art, or so I will propose in these pages, is an unceasing and continuous vital energy that never becomes repetitive, no matter how it might be disguised in this way.

If here we conclude that the secret of elites in different fields is somewhat linked to the capability of being alive, then what is the difficulty that prevent the majority from embracing this aliveness? The Chinese actor He Bin once commented on theater master Shizhi Yu: “Only after so many years do I start to realize the greatness of Shizhi Yu, which is that he never tries to please the audience”.<sup>8</sup> Not pleasing the audience, when being on stage, at first seems simple, but by paying less attention to the irrelevant, the artist can be truly involved in the moment, for there are no interruptions between the performer and the natural flow of art. Similarly, pianist Artur Schnabel<sup>9</sup> would address something as objectivity which we will discuss in later chapters, to also assure that the purity of a musical flow is not interfered with by other things.

He Bin himself admitted that he has not reached this place yet, where he is secure enough to not please. One time, however, after he was injured on stage by accident, he entered a place where “audience becomes clouds”, and he finished the performance with a peaceful mind. He felt great about this natural performance.<sup>10</sup> We sometimes admire masters and geniuses, not for their technique, but for something else. And that something could sometimes be simple. We often assume that after mastering all the necessary skills through repetitions, genius would come as a gift for diligence. However, the French philosopher Henri Bergson attempted to demonstrate to us a different order for learning. If we don’t have the quality of this “something”, we would not be able to learn art and music.

Like what we saw in Jiro and Dillard’s case, the concentration and peace that enables them to be clear-minded by restrictions, and thus be truly alive in their working process. We

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<sup>8</sup> YouKu (优酷). “Round Table Conversation Season 2, Episode 7: How to play antagonist? (圆桌派 S2 第7集 反派：怎么演“坏”人?)”. YouTube video, 36:29. Posted [June 2017]  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DNm056qwHvU&t=2189s>>[translated by author]

<sup>9</sup> Artur Schnabel: Austrian pianist

<sup>10</sup> YouKu. “Round Table Conversation”. YouTube.

often use music and art as a tool to get to peace, but we failed to recognize that music and art are not tools, but peace and aliveness itself. Tools would always be tools, if humanity doesn't make an effort to make them come to life. "There should always be a way to *begin* with the music, to make a student realize that technique is only a tool",<sup>11</sup> as Alfred Brendel said.<sup>12</sup> If music is aliveness itself, one should begin also with being alive. We think that to be a performer, one has to first be a true musician. And in order to be a musician, one has to be an alive human being first.

Humanity is complex enough that it can never be reduced to some simplified, symbolized formulas. The same goes for music and art. The role of knowledge and intelligence is ultimately insufficient. We see that even among musicians who have a style recognized as analytical and intellectual: they remind us of the difference between "formula" and vitality. They are aware of the insufficiency in knowledge. Brendel once said that he doesn't prefer to memorize harmonic progressions for memorization because: "I want to feel them as freshly as possible while I play". He is even "perhaps a little bit afraid that knowing them too well intellectually may detract from the spontaneity of my playing".<sup>13</sup>

My project will focus on what French philosopher Henri Bergson has to say on *aliveness*. It might give us the answer to the secrets of genius by revealing the essence of art. Music for Bergson is not only a metaphor to portray his philosophy, in all of his major works, it can also be considered as the very source of his thinking.. His connection with music starts before philosophy, as his father Michał Bergson was a talented pianist, who later was appointed as the head of the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève. Evidence also shows that even though the

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<sup>11</sup>Dubal, David. *Reflections from the Keyboard: The World of the Concert Pianist*. New York:Simon & Schuster Trade, 1986. p.88

<sup>12</sup>Alfred Brendel, Austrian pianist.

<sup>13</sup>Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.91

young Bergson was talented both in the sciences and the humanities, he gave up the former, and chose the latter as his career.<sup>14</sup> Knowing this background helps us to understand and appreciate Bergson more comprehensively. On the one hand, elements of humanities such as music, art and literature provided him nutrients when forming his philosophy, and what art and the humanities taught him has perfectly combined with and integrated into his philosophy. On the other hand, the logical and scientific training background allowed him to see the insufficiency of science, but at the same time, gave him the ability to efficiently organize language in order to express his philosophy.

His philosophical notions of duration and *élan vital* have already been suggested to have inspired multiple artists, writers, and composers.<sup>15</sup> Many musicologists have done research and analytical work to prove and emphasize this Bergsonian influence upon different composers and their musical works.<sup>16</sup> But to music performers, who need to bring different composers, from different eras work to life, Bergson's philosophy remains unknown to the majority of them. Despite the fact that his ideology has a strong connection to music, and tells a non negligible essence of music which can provide constructive and meaningful inspiration for music performers.

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<sup>14</sup> Referred from Lawlor, Leonard and Moulard Leonard, Valentine, "Henri Bergson", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta(ed.).  
<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/bergson/>>; "Henri Bergson." Encyclopædia Britannica. <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Henri-Bergson>>; "Michał Bergson," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*,

[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Micha%C5%82\\_Bergson&oldid=836667520](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Micha%C5%82_Bergson&oldid=836667520)

<sup>15</sup> Lawlor and Moulard Leonard, "Henri Bergson", *The Stanford Encyclopedia*

<sup>16</sup> Such as Keith Sally's journal *On Duration and Developing Variation: The Intersecting Ideologies of Henri Bergson and Arnold Schoenberg*, which demonstrated the relation between Schoenberg's ideology of developing variation and Bergson's concept of duration. Jessie Fillerup discussed a detailed relation between Ravel's *Le Gibet* and the philosophy of Deleuze and Bergson in *Eternity in Each Moment: Temporal Strategies in Ravel's*. Fillerup suggested Deleuze's notion of "smooth" space-time is a better fit for *Le Gibet* compare to Bergson's. Frisch studied Schubert with Bergson's philosophy on memory.

My project will attempt to reveal the connection between Bergsonian philosophy and music. I will connect Bergson's own words with different music performers' ideas as well as my own experience. We will be surprised that a Bergsonian philosophy is close to the language many musicians used when describing music and performance. His philosophy inspires a freedom that can be helpful to performers in whatever stage, whether in the middle of studying and practising, or in performance on stage. It reveals the secrets for genius and thus inspires it to grow.

This project is not intended to provide "golden rules" or try to reveal the "truth" of performing art. Far from it, it tries to serve as an inspiration for freedom, a myth-breaking project for any existing rules that have been repeated to music performers *ad infinitum*, and have locked them up and finally separated them from music. All the rules, if not ultimately subservient to liberation and the meaning of music, are in themselves meaningless.

## CHAPTER I Separations

“Common sense, which is occupied with detached objects, and also science, which considers isolated systems, are concerned only with the ends of the intervals and not with the intervals themselves”.<sup>17</sup>

Henri Bergson

“Music is not about pointing out different elements. A work of music is about integrating all the elements. If you are able to say, this is a very rhythmic part, this is a very emotional part, this is very technical part[...]you are not making music. You are only producing, could be some very interesting and very beautiful sounds. The difference between just sounds and music, is that when you make music, everything has to be integrated. You are not able to detach the different elements. Music is always about integration”.<sup>18</sup>

Daniel Barenboim

“In moments of great intensity, the spiritual and physical aspects of making music can become so completely unified that it is no longer possible to tell where one stops and the other begins. But

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<sup>17</sup>Bergson, Henri, and Arthur Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2012. p.9

<sup>18</sup>Allan Miller, *Barenboim on Beethoven: Masterclass*, (December 4, 2007; EMI Classics), DVD. Youtube clip for this quote can be found with uploader: pepeloco65. “*Masterclass n°3 Lang Lang - No 23- Barenboim on Beethoven*”. YouTube, 39:35. Posted [November 2017]  
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NYfrht6TU8>>; Daniel Barenboim: pianist, conductor

these two aspects may also sometimes disintegrate to a point where the creative potential of a performer cannot be realized at all”.<sup>19</sup>

Konrad Wolff & Artur Schnabel

Rules, expectations, techniques or simply what teachers have taught, according to Bergson, serve only to help music performers to grasp “the ends of the intervals”. he ends do not reveal the intervals themselves, and yet they occupy our mind. Sometimes when I am practising, I suddenly get stuck. This happens especially when I am working towards a certain technique, or a specific quality of sound, or all the elements I need to pay attention to for a really long time. I suddenly realize that I get lost in the “materials” I am working on, and the music has gone away from me, I don’t feel it anymore.

What exactly are these materials? What is the danger and consequence if we ignore the separation made by these materials, or elements from the integration of music, even if only temporarily? Bergson would define these “materials” from their origin, that is what, how and from where these materials are formed. By defining these materials, we might better understand the performer’s struggle.

### **i) Time & space or duration & space?**

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<sup>19</sup> Wolff, Konrad, and Artur Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation of Piano Music*. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 1979. P.22; Konrad Wolff: German pianist, musicologist.

Bergson first raised the theory of duration in his doctoral thesis: *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*. The English title of this work is *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. It was and continues to be an influential text.<sup>20</sup>

Duration formed from criticizing physical time. The ordinary and common way of considering time through representations and signs, are borrowed from mathematics and science, like the time that appears on a clock. Lewis Mumford argued that the invention of the clock “helped create the belief in an independent world of mathematically measurable sequences: the spatial world of science”.<sup>21</sup> Influenced by Bergson, Mumford thought that this quantitative method of measurement demonstrated in a scientific clockwise time supported by science has given us a common sense of what time is, as we have been taking granted for and has guided us into an independent and isolated scientific world. According to Mumford, clockwise time marked the triumph of science and measurement over “organic time----what Bergson calls duration”<sup>22</sup> in our modern civilization.

A mechanical clockwise time, for Bergson, is spatial time, rather than the temporal time. It externalizes the “real time” by using symbols and signs in order to represent it in space we live in. Through this process of externalization, the true mobility has gone; it captures only an immobile representation of real time. Scientific and mechanical time fails to show ultimate mobility, and thus freedom. This is where Bergson criticized Kant, for whom freedom is impossible in this world, but only possible somewhere outside of space and time. Bergson thinks Kant has mistakenly taken spatial time, time represented with spatial symbols, numbers and measurements as real time. Time as Kant understood it, is “in the sense of a medium in which we

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<sup>20</sup> See Lawlor and Moulard. "Henri Bergson", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.  
<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/bergson/>>.

<sup>21</sup> Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963. p.15

<sup>22</sup> Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization*. p.16



make distinctions and count”, “this is nothing but space”.<sup>23</sup> Space serves as a medium in which it holds various items still. To be able to calculate or make distinctions, we need these stable items presented in space. It is the prerequisite of any calculation and of any mathematics that there has to be stable unities first, in order for other stable unities to be added to them. And because Kant understood time with stable and immobile representations, as a result he lost the chance to encounter the real mobility which freedom dwells in.

Duration is this “pure mobility”,<sup>24</sup> opposed to the immobility of representations in space. Freedom for Bergson is possible because of his notion of duration. As musicians, have we been pushed in our education to delude into spatial representations the mobility of music? Let’s first go through some key component concepts that constitute Bergson’s duration to better understand why, for Bergson, spatial time fails to wholly present time, and why it restricts us inside stabilized space.

## ii) Heterogeneous vs. Homogeneous

“Ce qu'il faut dire, c'est que nous connaissons deux réalités d'ordre différent, l'une hétérogène, celle des qualités sensibles, l'autre homogène, qui est l'espace. Cette dernière, nettement conçue par l'intelligence humaine, nous met à même d'opérer des distinctions tranchées, de compter, d'abstraire, et peut-être aussi de parler”.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Bergson, Henri, and Frank Lubecki Pogson. *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1971. p.91

<sup>24</sup> Bergson, Henri, and Mabelle Louise Cunningham Andison. *The Creative Mind*. New York York: The Citadel Press, 1992[1946]

<sup>25</sup> Bergson, Henri: *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*. Electronic edition by Tremblay, Jean-Maire. A collection developed in collaboration with La Bibliothèque Paul-Émile-Boulet in University of Québec à Chicoutimi, 2002.

## Henri Bergson

There are heterogeneous and homogeneous realities for Bergson. “Heterogenous” refers to sensible qualities while “homogenous” indicates space. Homogenous is where men can use their intelligence to count, analyze and even speak, since language can be seen as combinations of representations and symbols that differ from the pure sensible qualities inside consciousness.

Why, for Bergson, is our intelligence, our ability to analyze and measure spatial?

Car si une somme s'obtient par la considération successive de différents termes, encore faut-il que chacun de ces termes demeure lorsqu'on passe au suivant, et attende, pour ainsi dire, qu'on l'ajoute aux autres : comment attendrait-il, s'il n'était qu'un instant de la durée ? et où attendrait-il, si nous ne le localisons dans l'espace?<sup>26</sup>

Unlike undefinable multiplicities in our consciousness, which are mobile and “incomplete”---in a sense that it is forever penetrating into one another, stability is a must-have prerequisite for defining an item: consider numbers in math calculations, for example. The latter have to be at rest, ‘demeurent’ in space as stabilized, immobile units for the purpose of calculation. Thus only in static space, not in mobility, according to Bergson, do we use intelligence to analyze and calculate.

In music, stabilized materials create barriers for performers to archive pure qualities. We see, in the infinite circle of studying a piece of music to performing it, that there is a constant tension between reason and emotion, structure and capriccioso, technique and music itself, and so on. It is interesting that these terms all seem to be opposites of each other. Thus, performers have innumerable tasks in regard to excelling each side of these opposites and balancing well the

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<[http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/bergson\\_henri/essai\\_conscience\\_immediate/conscience\\_imm.html](http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/bergson_henri/essai_conscience_immediate/conscience_imm.html)>  
p.47

<sup>26</sup> Bergson, Henri: *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*.

<[http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/bergson\\_henri/essai\\_conscience\\_immediate/conscience\\_imm.html](http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/bergson_henri/essai_conscience_immediate/conscience_imm.html)>  
p.40

proportion between them. It is also sometimes suggested that it is actually opposites that give birth to one another. As one violinist thinks that Bach and Schonberg “were giving themselves structures so that they would be even freer to write”.<sup>27</sup> This now becomes a rather eternal question, like when Nietzsche asked: How could anything originate out of its opposite?

All of this confuses performers. Even let’s assume the opposite elements give birth to each other, it won’t be obvious and clear for performers in the working process. Musicians too often get lost in one single element while trying to strive for perfection in all of the elements they are taught to be conscious of in order to make “good” playing. We will exemplify some of the extreme cases to demonstrate elements and separation.

For example, it is not rare to hear performances these days with refined, spectacular technique. The audience is usually impressed by the speed, clarity and correctness of the performance. But sometimes these aspects are not necessarily connected to music, and can even overshadow the meaning of music. Paul Badura-Skoda noted that this type of performance feels “like robots. As a professional, I can admire their technique but they leave their audiences cold”.<sup>28</sup> Incomparably perfect technique here becomes a separate element from music. The audience, although impressed, might not feel touched.

Sometimes there are other possibilities: there might be an extremely emotional performance, with the domination of an “oh poor me” sentiment that sometimes, instead of leading to a convincing, organic musical performance, breaks the logic and links in the piece and creates a nauseous experience. The lack of objectivity, boundary, and structure can negate the expressivity and the rich emotion, if the emotions are not together with the piece’s structure and

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<sup>27</sup> Hann, Hilary. “Bach Project - Hilary Hahn.” Michael Lawrence Films.  
<[http://www.mlfilms.com/productions/bach\\_project/hilary\\_hahn](http://www.mlfilms.com/productions/bach_project/hilary_hahn)>

<sup>28</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.52

make no sense logically. As Sir András Schiff would comment: “Birds are not anarchists, they fly in patterns”.<sup>29</sup> A lack of structure lessens the tension of the general performance.

Both of the performances found above lack something essential to the natural flow of music. Something stands there as a barrier which separates performers from the music they are making. In the former cases it is the technique and in the latter cases, it is the performer’s own emotional needs, which have overshadowed the musical needs. Whether it is by a lack of practise, too much practise, overthinking, or a lack of thinking, the technique and the emotional needs failed to be one with the music, and thus becomes a useless capability of mastering the instrument. This also creates an experience for the audience of being impressed from the outside, rather than involved and inspired from within, the capability of the performers have also made them separated, extracted, and drawn away from music. If performers themselves are not conveying the meaning of the musical language, then, the audience too becomes less and less involved and moved.

A third situation is convincing musicality but with poor technique, which would be more problematic to survive in the classical music industry nowadays. Among advanced students in major conservatories, this situation is far less common than the first two situations. Although here we are highly generalizing and simplifying, through these examples we can nevertheless glimpse some basic struggles performers might go through that lead them to prevent this extreme and choose the first ones, if they are unfortunately separated from music. All of these extremes are not only a struggle between emotion and logic, between perfect technique and its separation from music, between one’s personality and the objectivity of music, but also, the tendency

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<sup>29</sup> *Master Class with Sir András Schiff*. The Juilliard School, 2017.  
<<https://www.medic.tv/en/masterclasses/master-class-andras-schiff/>>.

towards the first extremes demonstrates a lack of psychological security among performers. This insecurity can easily transition to fear which even makes the separation bigger. It forces them always to wander among various extremes, but never enter into the music.

A lack of proficiency is unforgivable in the competitive music factory world and is also the fastest and easiest way to distinguish and judge performers. For if all of the extremes are equally bad, it is the one that is breaking the rules, that is making “literal mistakes” that is eliminated first. The choice of the very first case, which is to make the technique perfect, in most cases, would also come together with the implication of a more “musical correctness,” because by playing the required technique perfectly, one seems to reproduce the music faithfully, exactly as it is written on the score. A music correctness, as we will discuss later, certainly doesn’t violate any prohibition, it doesn’t challenge the general taste, just like it doesn’t particularly inspire anybody. It could even, “produce some very interesting and very beautiful sounds” as Daniel Barenboim has said. It is always the safest choice, unlike the second situation where performers are being audaciously personal. In the second situation, by being original and personal, they always bear the risk of challenging the authorities, even when it is a natural and convincing performance. The taste of judges or music critics has already been shaped by something Pierre Bourdieu would call their “habitus”.<sup>30</sup> All in all, professionalism can only be built with its foundation more or less on perfection, and on this premise, poorly mastered expressiveness opens itself to contempt or attack much more readily than more of a monotone

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<sup>30</sup>Habitus is “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways”, our taste for Bourdieu is not pure. Taste shapes patterns, and this pattern becomes a mechanical power which reshapes people. This rather mechanical taste, is another factor performers would consciously consider. See Wacquant, L.(2005) *Habitus. International Encyclopedia of Economic Sociology*. J. Beckett and Z. Milan. London, Routledge.

approach. Unless it is an expressivity as divine as genius such as Alfred Cortot's.<sup>31</sup> In other words, if you are not a genius, it is then better to do everything correct and challenge as few people as possible. To play flawlessly, securely, with no audacious risk is one of the golden rules for surviving in competitions, and under various proficiency stresses.

But as soon as music becomes a tool for surviving in competitions, the environment becomes harder for genius to grow. Those who complain about a lack of originality among today's younger performers, if here we are assuming it is true, are likely the same ones who kill genius at their earlier stage. Perfection and security are important, but they shouldn't, in any situation, dominate the art industry, nor should they ever lead to fear. For the essence of art is creation and "implies a latent belief in the spontaneity of nature".<sup>32</sup>

Thus it is crucial for performers in their working process to abandon the tortured mechanism of factory workers and to have a healthy and natural relationship with music, starting with a practice without fear. To some degree, trust, in contrast to doubt and fear, of one's natural physical gestures, as well as the trust for the natural music line, is essential and the only way to embrace the vitality of music and bring it to life in performance. This trust should not in any circumstances be replaced by some forced elements which do not disseminate with a performer's natural impulse. All the rules are pointless, when they refuse to integrate themselves with the impetus of music.

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<sup>31</sup>Although Cortot is one of my favourites, but as an example used by Barthes when mocking the "verbal manias" that "make us affirm by a slight of syntax...", that such and such... person is "le premier de tous", "Cortot: 'premier, ou plus grand pianiste du siècle'—et encore plus, cette inflation qui consiste à tourner 'le premier' en 'le seul'". Favouring Cortot, criticizing younger generations, and making the environment impossible for another "Cortot" to grow, might as well be a habitus in the music world. See Van Zuylen, Marina. "SNOBBERY AND THE SHAMEFUL FAMILIARITY OF SELFHOOD." *Equinoxes*, Issue 9: Printemps/Eté 2007 Article ©2007.

<[https://www.brown.edu/Research/Equinoxes/journal/Issue%209/eqx9\\_zuylen.html](https://www.brown.edu/Research/Equinoxes/journal/Issue%209/eqx9_zuylen.html)>.

<sup>32</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.45

All of the extreme situations listed above are artificial distinctions. Great musicality would never have this “separation” between effort and spirit. Perhaps it is good for us to look at what Emmanuel Godo thinks of conversation: “Ce qu’ils ne voient pas, c’est que la bonne conversation est un art---c’est-à-dire une technique qui sait s’oublier, s’effacer de son apparent contraire: l’improvisation”.<sup>33</sup> Conversation, just as sushi making for Jiro Ono, once it becomes an art, it becomes a living spirit, as we also can see from the character of Mme Dorsin in Marivaux’s unfinished novel *La Vie de Marianne*: “c’est que leur bon esprit suppléait aux tournures obscures et maladroites du mien”.<sup>34</sup> What Marianne observed through Mme Dorsin, what she would call as the “bon esprit,” is probably what is missing in some of the performances exemplified above. The process of working should not be a slaughterhouse for spirit. We will discuss this more in part II. Education stuffs our mind with what Bergson would define as “homogenous materials”. As we see in Godo’s book, there is a list of various elements, one has to pay attention to in conversations: “saillies, contes, bons mots...l’inattention, l’habitude d’interrompre, l’empressement trop grand de montrer de l’esprit, l’égoïsme, le despotisme, le pédantisme, le défaut de suite, l’esprit de plaisanterie, l’esprit de contradiction, la dispute et la propension à substituer la conversation particulière à la conversation générale sont de mise dans la plupart de salons décrits par Proust”.<sup>35</sup> All of these elements in conversation troubled Marcel Proust, in many senses, Bergson’s follower in the domain of literature. For he thinks that these elements enables people to only “entre les deux établir une concordance mais *non combler* l’intervalle”.<sup>36</sup> As Bergson would say, it is because detached elements “are concerned only with

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<sup>33</sup> Godo, Emmanuel. *Une Histoire De La Conversation*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2003. p.158

<sup>34</sup> Godo, *Une Histoire*, p.159

<sup>35</sup> Godo, *Une Histoire*, p.274

<sup>36</sup> Godo, *Une Histoire*, p.273

the ends of the intervals and not with the intervals”.<sup>37</sup> Like we have seen in all of the troubled performances, in the middle of struggles and attempts to deal with all the various elements which serves only as the ends of music, performers have long forgotten that “art lives on creation and implies a latent belief in the spontaneity of nature”.<sup>38</sup>

I must confess to creating these three highly simplifying and generalizing extremes that I used, for here I am creating separations myself. Something I will argue against throughout this project. In reality, we would sense that situations among performers are more complex than the three listed above. Now I understand Bergson on the moment when he recognizes that the word ‘several’ is an inappropriate and inaccurate adjective to describe his idea of multiplicities which we will encounter a little later, but he used this word nevertheless.<sup>39</sup>

Despite my categorizing and generalizing in order to make points clear, all of the performances I exemplified above, do exist, even if in reality they wouldn’t be exactly the same situation. Performers must calculate and balance every elements they know to the best degree during their working process. Especially in the context nowadays with a competitive marketing environment, music performers are often driven to acquire security, something to make sure they are professional and flawless on all occasions. Jorge Bolet observed that “...the young generation of pianists[...]usually have a flawless mechanical control of everything they play”.<sup>40</sup> However as results, these types of performances feel partial in the end, as if something is missing, as French pianist Philippe Entremont demonstrated this sense of missing by saying that when he “wakes up the following morning, most of what I heard the night before has not stayed with me[...]”, even

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<sup>37</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.9

<sup>38</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.45

<sup>39</sup> See Lawlor and Moulard, "Henri Bergson", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.  
<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/bergson/>>

<sup>40</sup>Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.79. Jorge Bolet: American pianist, teacher



though it was a “beautiful playing”, and that “there’s no doubt that I am captivated by the perfection of what I hear.” This situation, according to Entremont, would never happen to “a pianist like Cortot---even his mistakes were fabulous”.<sup>41</sup> Although performers paid attention well to some aspects, and even perfectly in all aspects one could think of in music, but as a whole the music’s life has not been vitalized through its performer. These perfect performances does not live in Bergson’s duration where freedom dwells, but rather in countable and limited space where the audience can easily judge its perfection. At the end of this chapter, Bergson might give us the key to the essence these performers are lacking. But first we need to explore further realities about space and duration with Bergson.

### iii) Quality & Quantity:

Another way that Bergson approaches the opposition between space and duration, homogeneity and heterogeneity, is by means of quantity and quality. Bergson gives many examples in *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* to illustrate this opposition. We deform our sensational and emotional process, and thus distort life itself by interpreting everything under the sign of quantity, of size and therefore of space. One of the examples Bergson gives us is the experiment of candles.

If we put four candles around a sheet of white paper, and then remove one candle, normally we would say the light cast on the sheet of paper has *decreased*. For Bergson however,

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<sup>41</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.153. Philippe Entremont: French pianist

it is rather the color of the paper that has changed: it has become a new colour. Decreasing implies a quantity change but for Bergson, here is a quality change:

Les variations d'éclat d'une couleur donnée...se réduiraient donc à des changements qualitatifs, si nous n'avions pas contracté l'habitude de...substituer à notre impression naïve ce que l'expérience et la science nous apprennent.<sup>42</sup>

Here we see if one color appears in a different variation of its brightness, in our deep consciousness, which is our deepest impression, we experienced a whole qualitative change, instead of which is based on our habits and science would tell us. Bergson argues we perceive all the quality changes in our deepest impressions---where our intuition is. Our experiences with science and our intellect doesn't do the job of perceiving, but categorizing. The lively quality change under categorization thus becomes a quantity change of a certain *stabilized* quality.

Music are these qualities. It cannot be quantified to definable items in homogeneous space that artificially made various separations. As we have seen before, if performers are dominated by habits, attention to rules, or everything their past experience and intellect told them, then it is extremely likely that they will not be able to bring the music to life as a complete qualitative experience. The quality of the music as a whole has been broken down and deformed by a performer's concentration on quantitative signs. Just as Daniel Barenboim commented:

Music is not about pointing out different elements. A work of music is about integrating all the elements. If you are able to say, this is a very rhythmic part, this is a very emotional part, this is very technical part...you are not making music. You are only producing, could be some very interesting and very beautiful sounds. The difference between just sounds and music, is that when you make music, everything has to be integrated. You are not able to detach the different elements. Music is always about integration.

When music becomes quantitative parts, whether it is from rhythm to emotion, or from emotion to technique, it is no longer integrated into a pure quality. When music has been distorted by a

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<sup>42</sup> Bergson, Henri: *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, p.29

performer's intellect into different units, a beautiful sound is still attainable through technique, as we saw in our example for Troubled Performance Number 1, where musically and technically everything is correct, but one is "not making music". As Barenboim would say, the biggest difference between sound and music, is that music "is always about integration".

Bergson's philosophy is also about integration. What's more, by claiming the reality of quality instead of quantity, it becomes clear that pure genius, as we discussed in the introduction, or pure spontaneity, which does not require cultivation, doesn't exist for Bergson. If it does, it is because we associated with spatial concept of *one* as its quantity, and duration is thus immobilized in quantitative zone again. In Bergson's duration, everything is about the *process*. This process is slightly different than a musician's working process, when they are dealing with multiple elements separately, which is largely what they have been taught. Both Schnabel and his student Wolff agree, these separations are: "mostly due to the fact that music and technique are to a large degree separately trained and developed, and that they undergo partly separate experiences". This becomes the "principal pedagogical problem" for Schnabel, and "all his teaching showed his effort to bridge this gulf".<sup>43</sup> A. Brendel also commented that only "extremely capable teachers" are able to "not divide technique from music". He thinks this is one of the most important part for what consists of "the best musical training" for young performers.<sup>44</sup> We here want to say that even if one doesn't have the luck to get "extremely capable teachers", it is always good to realize that the best teacher is always within oneself. Brendel himself, also didn't have any regular teacher after sixteen. Bergson's process here would serve as a great teacher who can remind and inspire performers to prevent from the beginning, separations that might cause trouble to music.

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<sup>43</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p.22

<sup>44</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.88

What we distinguished as genius is a judgement of a certain process from outside. One of the sign that this process is taking place, both for Bergson and Barenboim, is integration. Like Barenboim, Bergson also noticed that there are some pre-existing elements, before integration. But in his philosophy, once elements start to integrate, they cease to be spatial items, in another words, they are not the same elements any more. In order to better understand this idea, let's now study Bergson's notion of the difference between spatial multiplicities and the qualitative multiplicities of duration. It will reveal to us that inside duration, there are neither singular, nor multiples quantities, and thus we can demonstrate how music would "integrate all the elements".

#### **vi) Quantitative multiplicities & Qualitative multiplicities:**

Multiplicities, as Deleuze claimed, should be considered as one of the most important and influential philosophical concepts that Bergson distributed to the world. We see a Bergsonian trace of multiplicities in Deleuze's philosophy as well, notably in his rhizome theory. Multiplicity is one of the key component concepts for duration.

If we apply Bergson's definition of quality and quantity here we get two types of multiplicities. One is quantitative, dealing with "material objects", to which "the conception of number is immediately applicable", this is the multiplicity we applied in mathematics. Another multiplicity is in "states of consciousness", it is heterogeneous, where "several conscious states are organized into a whole, permeate one another, [and] gradually gain a richer content".<sup>45</sup> It is uncountable, and thus Bergson even claimed that the word 'several' is an inaccurate choice to

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<sup>45</sup> Bergson and Pogson. *Time and Free Will*, p.122

describe this pure qualitative multiplicity since it implies numbering and quantity in space. For Bergson, he is trying to define something that is new.

This new qualitative multiplicity “cannot be regarded as numerical without the help of some symbolic representation, in which the necessary element is space” (*Time and Free Will*, p.87).<sup>46</sup> The process of extracting from the continuous qualitative duration and putting it in space by using symbolic representation is what intelligence makes us do everyday. Separations thus are created in performances. Performers are carefully attentive to all the elements, without realizing that these elements have already become symbolic representations. They separate themselves from the continuous qualitative and durational reality of the music. Bergson later, when describing the role of human intelligence in his work *Evolutionary Creation*, would call this process *descending*, where the aliveness is descended into materials in space.

Both Barenboim and Bergson do not deny the existence of “different elements”, but they seek to emphasize that duration and music do not consist of these deadly elements. Once in music, elements should be living in the process, they should be constantly in the process of changing and penetrating each other. Music is alive when multiplicities start to integrate in duration.

Yet in the process of working, there are constant challenges and tasks for musicians to overcome. Separations sometimes arrive without notice in the middle of the process, when one is paying attention to various specific challenges. Even when every technical task is solved, there is still this psychological fear for bouts of bad luck. In the end, live performance is truly a risky job. Unlike recordings which can be considered much “safer” in this manner, since one can play the same passages of music multiple times, and one is able to do editing afterwards. But at the same

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<sup>46</sup> Bergson and Poggson. *Time and Free Will*, p.87

time, as many musicians have suggested, recording is less exciting than live performance:

“Where is the inspiration of the moment; the new ideas that emerge while performing, which is something I experience all the time?”<sup>47</sup> Paul Dubal commented that in live performance “there is excitement in the air”, while in a recording session, it is more like “a result of the homogenization that has occurred through the technical perfection”.<sup>48</sup> Then what is this excitement described by both Bolet and Dubal for live performance? Does it come from the risk of not being perfect?

We will discuss later more in detail about perfection and security. What Bergson suggests is that the behavior of any living organism can never be calculated, what it will do cannot be foreseen before it acts. The perfection of parts wouldn’t grant meaning to music. There will be endless problems for performers, if they constantly in their working process isolate materials and thus create separations within the fluidity of music. As Bergson noticed, in music “if we interrupt the rhythm by dwelling longer than is right on one note of the tune, it is not its exaggerated length, which will warn us of our mistake, but the *qualitative change* thereby caused *in the whole of the musical phrase*”.<sup>49</sup> If we separated one single note from the flow of music, the exaggeration of this single note is not what harms the music. It is the qualitative change caused by this note in the whole of the musical phrase that troubles music. Performers are all educated, in a good way, to pay close attention to details. But it is good to keep in mind that the qualitative duration is what ultimately matters to music, as Bergson told us. That should be the goal for practice, as opposed to attempting to perfect separate elements. Music should be the goal for practice.

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<sup>47</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.79

<sup>48</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.79

<sup>49</sup> Bergson and Pogson. *Time and Free Will*, p.47

Paul Tortelier has warned performers not to be drowned by meaningless perfection: “Young virtuosi, beware, if someone compliments you on your ‘exceptionally beautiful vibrato,’ it probably means that you’ve been seduced by the irrelevant”.<sup>50</sup> An exceptionally beautiful vibrato is perfect in itself. But this beautiful vibrato is the same as Bergson’s single exaggerated note. Separated from music, they become spatial items lacking mobility and aliveness. Although, as Barenboim and Tortelier suggest, they might be able to produce “exceptionally beautiful” things, these things are irrelevant to music in its entirety.

We have seen so far various troubles created by separations, but what can we say, with Bergson, about the larger meaning of working on a piece of music? If work is not about making separations, if it is not about dealing with divided symbolic representations, then what would work look like? We have already caught a glimpse of this question through Bergson’s multiplicities. We saw that, for Bergson, qualitative multiplicities are neither singular nor multiple. He implies here that the process would take some sort of effort, by denying the singular quantity. Yet it is also not about homogenous multiplicities where different elements make separations. What is this effort then, that would allow us to work without entering into homogeneity and creating separations?

## CHAPTER II Meaning and Effort of Work

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<sup>50</sup> Tortelier, Paul, and David Blum. *Paul Tortelier: A Self-portrait in Conversation with David Blum*. London: Heinemann, 1984. p.100

### i) The History of externalizing the effort of work

For a long while now, many have doubted the honor associated with work. In *Le Droit à la paresse*, Lafargue wrote: “Pour l’Espagnol, chez qui l’animal primitif n’est pas atrophié, le travail est le pire des esclavage. Les Grecs de la grande époque n’avaient...que du mépris pour le travail: aux esclaves seuls il était permis de travailler”(Le droit à la paresse).<sup>51</sup> For people around the world, work is often associated with both physical and mental slavery. This is not only true for the Spanish and Greeks, Annie Ernaux has also demonstrated a vivid picture for readers in *La femme gelée*, how the repetition of household chores can imprison housewives. We see Montaigne think people spend too much effort on studying: “comme les plantes s’étouffent d’avoir trop d’humidité et les lampes trop d’huile”, or like having one’s stomach “plein de nourriture...[et] elle ne se digère pas”. In the end, our head is uncomfortably stuffed with knowledge: “Oh! Les lourdes têtes”.<sup>52</sup> All these efforts of work listed above have one thing in common, which is that they don’t serve our very being. The work and efforts can easily turn people into mere slaves, especially when we do the work *outside* of ourselves, like eating food beyond digestion or a plant having too much water. The water not only isn’t transformed into nutrients; it even has the danger of drowning the plant. This is the same reason why Proust, who is the appreciator of Bergson's philosophy, was well scared of the long lists of all the details he felt he needed to be aware of, as we previously demonstrated on page 12. When rules become excessive, it is possible that the subjects, to whom these various rules are applied, become objects. For subject should be able to inactivate *movements*. Slavery thus can come not only for

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<sup>51</sup>Lafargue, Paul. “Le droit à la paresse: Réfutation du droit au travail de 1848.” *Marxists Internet Archive*. <[https://www.marxists.org/francais/lafargue/works/1880/00/lafargue\\_18800000.htm](https://www.marxists.org/francais/lafargue/works/1880/00/lafargue_18800000.htm)> [accessed on April 2018].

<sup>52</sup> Montaigne, Michel, and André Lanly. *Sur L'oisiveté: et autres essais en français moderne*. Paris: Gallimard, 2015. P.15, 27



factory workers, but in many other forms when the emphasis on spatial elements has overthrown the vitality of beings.

Similar lists exist for music performers, as with all other forms of art. In order to prevent slavery, it thus is beneficial to sit down, away from the instrument, or take a walk like Montaigne liked to do and ask ourselves: If music, through work, has become more and more automatic, to serve the purpose of safety; if through practise, music is not becoming more and more vivid and clear for musicians, then what are we doing? What is the meaning of the torture?

According to Karl Marx, labor causes slavery when a worker “feels at home when he is not working, and when he is working he does not feel at home”.<sup>53</sup> Just as we demonstrated before with Jiro Ono and Annie Dillard’s case, they both have a deep recognition of belonging, when they are making sushi, or doing meditation: their effort is part of what makes them alive as human beings. There are naturally rules for sushi-making, as well as for meditation, but theses rules, by some means, are not “externalized” to their being in their working process.

How can it be possible to make rules intrinsic in working? Bergson’s ideology of sympathy would give us a key to this question. As a moral feeling, sympathy also serves as a great example to help us understand better many Bergsonian notion such as duration, which we’ve already come across, as well as intuition and *élan vital*, which we will all encounter later.

## ii) Sympathy

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<sup>53</sup> Marx, Karl. “Estranged Labour.” *Marxists Internet Archive*.  
<<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/manuscripts/labour.htm>> [accessed on April 2018].

We have seen before that only inside our deepest impression---intuition, we are able to perceive all the quality changes, which science and intellect would try to categorize. Through studying sympathy, we might approach the idea of intuition, which serves as the key notion to this project.

By dissecting our sympathy, we can see this moral feeling as a successive and inseparable process of emotional life. According to Bergson, sympathy is originated by putting ourselves into the place of others, feeling their pain. But since pain is naturally “abhorrent to us”, then it would also naturally make us abhor the pain of others. So a new element is required: Bergson used La Rochefoucauld’s so-called “calculated sympathy” to show that although there might be an abhorrence of the pitiful, there is also a dread for future evil to ourselves that “holds a place in our compassion for others’ evil”. This means that if we don’t help others this time, then in the future we might not get any aid when we are suffering. For Bergson, both these phases are “lower forms of pity”.<sup>54</sup>

The true and higher form of sympathy would consist more of a desire for pain. We want to prove we are innocent: as “if nature were committing some great injustice”, that “it were necessary to get rid of all suspicion of complicity with her”( *Time and Free Will*, p.19).<sup>55</sup> Meaning that life might be unfair and unjust, but we are not complicit with it. This would give us a sense of a superior feeling of self. As Bergson puts it, it is “a need for self-abasement, an aspiration downward into pain”.<sup>56</sup> We need this pain for our self estimation. We feel proud of ourselves since we are now temporarily detached from worldly sensuous goods . But in the end, there might as well come in a sense of humility because of the fact that we are detached from

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<sup>54</sup> Bergson and Pogson. *Time and Free Will*, p.19

<sup>55</sup> Bergson and Pogson. *Time and Free Will*, p.19

<sup>56</sup> Referring *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

sensuous goods. We lack them. So as we can see, sympathy is referring to this whole process of conscious activity: it transitions from “repugnance to fear, from fear to sympathy, and from sympathy itself to humility” (*Time and Free Will*, p.19); it is a qualitative multiplicity. As each of the feelings passes into another, there is a heterogeneity of each feeling, but none of these feelings are juxtaposed to the others. For Bergson, only in space can items be juxtaposed one another. Inside consciousness, there is merely a qualitative process, meaning that all feelings are closely interpenetrated with each other, it is forever continuous and always in progress.

We can conclude here that sympathy is a continuous progress of consciousness. It is a qualitative multiplicity founded on “putting oneself in the place of others”. Thus, the notion of sympathy suggests a sense of entering into the thing, and feeling the progress of qualitative multiplicities from within, rather than going around it from the outside.

In the beginning of *The Creative Mind*, Bergson links intuition to sympathy.<sup>57</sup> Sympathy, as we have just seen, consists of “putting oneself in the place of others”. Thus the notion of Bergsonian intuition suggests this same sense of “entering into the thing, rather than going around it from the outside...”.<sup>58</sup> It can bring us back to the original vital force of life.

How can this idea of sympathy give us constructive meaning in the face of rules? And specifically, how can “putting oneself in the place of others,” as sympathy suggests, help us understand our relationship to rules?

### **iii) Slavery, correctness, and loyalty**

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<sup>57</sup> *The Stanford Encyclopedia*, V. “Creative evolution”

<sup>58</sup> Quoted from *The Stanford Encyclopedia*, III. “The method of intuition”

“I think one can serve the composer’s best interests without being his slave. Even if one tries to follow the composer’s aims as closely as possible, a gap, which is greater with some composers than with others, will always remain. It is necessary to fill this gap with the help of one's emotions...For me, it’s always important to think about the music from the composer’s point of view”.<sup>59</sup>

Alfred Brendel

“...or as Heine says, if the presentation would be able to ‘reveal the performer standing on the same free spiritual heights as the composer, if it convinces us that he too is free’”.<sup>60</sup>

Heine

From the earliest stage of learning music, all musicians are taught to respect and be humble in front of music and its composers, to correctly understand the composer’s intention and always put music before oneself. But oftentimes, it is easy for us to misconceive loyalty to the score as a fear for correctness. Let us exemplify the difference now. As Austrian pianist Artur Schnabel, and many other musicians have believed, the “intentions of the composers are paramount”, and “humility towards the printed score is a foregone conclusion”.<sup>61</sup> Other musicians have also described the composer as God.<sup>62</sup> This loyalty and faith to the score thus can be very misunderstood as a passive activity of fear and restriction, to be lost among all the

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<sup>59</sup>Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.90

<sup>60</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p.15

<sup>61</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p.15

<sup>62</sup>Pianist Fou Ts'ong said this in several occasion, to describe the reverence of music and its composer, as opposed to satisfy the self ego of the performers. See *Looking towards 70: Interview collection with Fou Ts'ong* collected and interview by Min, Fu. Tian Jin: Tian Jin Academy of Social Science Publication. 2004.

symbols and markings the composer left to us. Just as Heine would say, performers should stand “on the same free spiritual heights as the composer, if it convinces us that he too is free”. The reason that one needs to study the score is not to enchain the performer and eliminate spontaneity. In order to vitalize a composer’s music, he or she has to be first equal to the composer, to be spiritually together with the composer, to stand “on the same free spiritual heights as the composer”. This would mean that one has to completely understand the composer, fully connect with the composer, first through studying the score, for the only primary source that classical musicians have, in most cases, is the score. A performer should thus “seek the ideal of making music which shall be both absolutely faithful and yet completely unfettered”, a faithful relationship to the composer, as the first step, serves to ultimately make the music the performer’s *own*.

Schnabel also thinks that “within these confines”, the performer is “free, active and formative in a way that is his own special privilege...it is he who is the musician”. These “confines”, described by Schnabel, we think are actually true involvement in the music and composer’s mind, an involvement that can be disguised as restriction. Performers have to know that these ‘confines’ are actually the opposite of enslavement, which is real restriction. Schnabel sees that there are many performances that are “accurate in detail and beautiful in sound, but lack the power of communicating the essence of the score...[the performer is] simply unable to bring his conceptions convincingly to the fore”.<sup>63</sup> We can see here that the score for Schnabel is much more than homogenous details. The score is used as a means for the composer to preserve their music in the world, and this aliveness, according to Bergson’s philosophy, can’t be preserved in space, we will see later that Bergson claimed the only way to “preserve” aliveness is to make it

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<sup>63</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p.22

happen again. A musical score thus does not equal the living music that existed inside the composer's brain, and it is the performer, through studying the score, who rejoins the vitality of music in the composer's mind, and thus "stand on the same free spiritual heights as the composer". This eagerness to be together with the composer, or as Brendel puts it, to "think about the music from the composer's point of view", would encourage great musicians to not only study one edition of a score, but to compare various *Urtext*; not only to explore one piece, but also to understand the composer's background, etc.

This emphasis on understanding, or "humility" in Schnabel's word, towards the score also has other benefits. It can help the process of letting music speak *for itself*, or "as the composer himself created it,"<sup>64</sup> in Liszt's words, without performers consciously or unconsciously carrying with different homogeneous elements to interfere with. We will return to this topic in part IV and part VI.

If Schnabel and other musicians emphasize the importance of humbly studying the score, it's in order not to misdirect the concept of vitality down some sort of anarchist path. Here we want to emphasize that what we have described as loyalty is something totally different than the concept of correctness, and the latter is also not vitality: For vitality is about integration, while correctness creates separations to music. "We may say then", in Bergson's word, "that this first kind of order is that of the *vital* order of the *willed*, in opposition to the second, which is that of the *inert* and the *automatic*".<sup>65</sup> If the composer is alive in performance, it is through the aliveness of the performer. If by dominating the composer, the music won't come *as itself*, the vitality would also be absent if the performer is lower than the composer.

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<sup>64</sup> Friedheim, Arthur, and Theodore L. Bullock. *Life and Liszt: The Recollections of a Concert Pianist*. Dover ed. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2012. p.52

<sup>65</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.224

Just as we've already seen before, loyalty to the score, for Schnabel, does not equal the correctness of homogenous details, since "unwritten rules govern subtle nuances of dynamics and rhythm. There are no symbols that would make notation of these subtleties possible...[a] true musician will not miss these nuances if he subjects the score to intense penetration by his eye and *inner ear*".<sup>66</sup> This process of penetration by the eye and inner ear resonates with Bergson's duration. It is a process of integration and penetration, in order to vitalize the score, in order to be one with the music that lives in the composer's mind. As Russell Sherman stated in his book of reflections on music and philosophy, *Piano Pieces*: "when one plays Beethoven, one must serve Beethoven. No, one must represent Beethoven. No, one must be Beethoven".<sup>67</sup> At first, performers try their best to study a composer, which might lead people to think that they are the composer's servants. But as one looks closer, one realizes that this process, in the end, makes performers unify with the composer; the two become one. It is the aliveness of the performer that brings meaning to Beethoven's score. Just as Bolet observed in an interview with Dubal that today's "audiences go to the concert hall to hear Beethoven and Schubert and Brahms...But back [then]...When you went to hear Cortot... you went to hear what Cortot had to say about Chopin". Dubal responded, "Indeed...the text is sacred and so is the composer...the audience applauds wildly because Beethoven is a *very status* composer. In a sense, the audience is applauding itself for being there".<sup>68</sup> One of the consequences of bestowing on the composer a sacred status is that, as a result, the majority of the composer's followers refuse to humanize the composer, and thus to live together with the composer's music. Dubal commented that these "all-Beethoven

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<sup>66</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p.27

<sup>67</sup> Sherman, Russell. *Piano Pieces*. New York: North Point Press, 1997. p.244

<sup>68</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.81

concerts... have sometimes been quite dull”, but the audience still “applauds wildly” to appreciate their presence during the moment of worship.

As Franz Liszt stated it, the performer:

is not a mason who, chisel in hand, faithfully and conscientiously whittles stone after the design of an architect...He is called upon to make emotion speak, and weep, and sing, and sigh--to bring it to life in his consciousness. He creates as the composer himself created.... He breathes life into the lethargic body, infuses it with fire, enlivens it with the pulse of grace and charm. He changes the earthly form into a living being...<sup>69</sup>

The performer’s mission is to be one with the creation of the composer in live performance. He is not the passive tool for reproducing a correct interpretation of the score. But loyalty to the score, as we discussed before, aims to help this process. It ensures that the composer is at the same height as the performer, because if he is lower, then the music ceases to be alive as itself.

Thus correctness should never dominate a performer’s mind, even thoughts about the correct execution of to the composer’s score. This is a more “advanced” fear for correctness. Compared to the correctness of notes and technique, this claims to make “music”, and composers sound correct. This new form of correctness often is disguised under a much fancier mask, but can also be a restriction that is ultimately harmful.

For example, there is always a certain “style” that preoccupies us before we delve into a particular piece. We thus try to make music correct by playing it within a correct style in accordance with different composers. This would be in agreement with Schnabel’s belief against “stylistic generalizations”, as he thought that: “this kind of pseudo-stylistic approach [was]... irrelevant, and ...distracted from the character of each individual composition. All good composers mean each score to stand on its own...”<sup>70</sup> The process of “stylistic generalization”

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<sup>69</sup> Friedheim, Arthur, and Theodore L. Bullock. *Life and Liszt: The Recollections of a Concert Pianist*. Dover ed. Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2012. p.52

<sup>70</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p.16



doesn't help the performer to understand and appreciate music as its own qualitative reality. By categorizing music according to different composers, performers are distracted from the character of individual compositions.

Using Bergson's philosophy, we can understand better the difference between what I described as being correct and being loyal. In Bergson's ideology, this "pseudo-stylistic" approach, which distracted from the individuality of the music, is what we do when we only use our intellects to "immobilize" the composer. However the process which Schnabel emphasized regarding the loyalty to score, is an effort to mobilize the composer.

For instance, one might argue that Mozart's trill should always start with the upper note:



Figure 1 Short trills demonstrated from Leopold Mozart, 1756.

“There is no reason to suppose that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) ever deviated from the teachings of his father”

"The Trill in the Classical Period (1750-1820)." *Rick Wilson's Historical Flutes*

Page. <http://www.oldflutes.com/articles/classicaltrill/index.htm>.

But “all of these are only rules of thumb”, it is “a matter of opinion with no single "right" way”.<sup>71</sup> Once, my teacher told me to start the trill from the same note for one place in Sonata K.332. Musically, this would make more sense in this particular place. I listened to many recordings afterwards that also agree with my teacher here. My teacher confessed however during the lesson: “I know some people might insist on these rules, and maybe they would

<sup>71</sup> See "Trill (music)," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*,  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Trill\\_\(music\)&oldid=834162634](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Trill_(music)&oldid=834162634)>

terribly disagree with me”. These pre-existent rules exist in one’s mind, and take the place of the individuality of a performer and his or her performance. And our education continues to reinforce these rules. Although one can’t deny the correctness of these rules, and they are sometimes very helpful in giving performers instant benefits to approaching a composer. But the point here is to show that the rules are ultimately insufficient.

What is correctness? The aliveness of music is itself correctness. All other forms of correctness remain meaningless. Aliveness can never come together with fear, but in the pursuit of correctness, there is always a fear that arises, and a higher or fancier form of fear is still a fear which always has the danger of blocking mobility during practice, and in performance. Loyalty and humility are directed toward peace, which will be the topic for our next part. Only these enable vitality through intuition or the process of sympathy. They cannot be transformed into fear.

If one attends any music master class, they will find that most of the time it is an experience of musical journey that rarely concentrates on correctness. Even talking about the score’s correct reproduction, it only means to bring this particular composer, and his music *vividly* to life, to make music speak, to put meaning, emotion and depth into music. “One must be Beethoven”. If in this very moment, there is still a separation between the performer and the composer, whether as a result of various regulations and rules, or of the fears arising from the idea of loyalty to the composer, then the vitality and spirit of the composer is always overshadowed.

Some might still argue, however, that in the early stages of a performer’s working process, aliveness should not be the priority. The question is one of order. Some would say that these masterclasses are obviously not designed to teach basic correctness, and are rather more

focused on musical inspiration. Because the student performers who have been selected to play in these public masterclasses have already achieved an adequate level of correctness. Following this reasoning, one might still be under the illusion that fear for correctness is beneficial to preparing a piece of music, because it suggests that one has to at least be more advanced in something in order to have the capability to feel the music, to surpass the score, and to be free. As if to gain the necessary tool to be ultimately free is a separate process outside of music.

We therefore would like to thoroughly clarify these possibilities for confusion by introducing the notion peace. As we have already seen, what Schnabel would call loyalty actually serves freedom. Loyalty seeks to inspire a sense of creation in the moment of performance, just as the composer himself created in inventing the original score, in other words, it means to make the music speaks as itself. Loyalty to the score grants us objectivity and a purified mind, and it should be evident that the proper order for approaching a piece of music always begins with a purified mind. It is impossible to start from a fear for correctness, and then hope to arrive at peace. Fear for correctness never allows for the purification of the mind that might succeed in embracing the moment to be alive as one with the composer.

#### **iv) A purified mind**

“...if the performer became one with the music the audience would feel it, while if he tried to play *to* an audience, he would not be able to do full justice to the music”.<sup>72</sup>

Konrad Wolff & Artur Schnabel

“The greatness of the theater artist Shizhi Yu, which only after so many years now do I start to realize, is that he never tried to please the audience”.<sup>73</sup>

He Bin

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<sup>72</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p.16

<sup>73</sup>YouKu. “*Round Table Conversation*”. YouTube.

In this part, we will exemplify that in order to finally embrace the essence of music, instead of from fear, one should depart from peace and concentration. The pianist and educator John Browning has observed: “Whatever freedom [students] may have in their lives, it doesn’t apply to the music: They play like fourteenth-century nuns ... most nuns would have had more fire!”<sup>74</sup> What makes students unable to apply freedom in performance and thus resemble nuns? All the rules and fears we discussed before are the causes, but here we want to talk about some other elements, which also function as a barrier between performer and music from a psychological approach. It is necessary to address this question before going on to explore what we call aliveness, because it is our contention that if one is not at peace, one is not ready to make of music a process of integration. Similarly, the lack of trust in aliveness inhibits growth. We will see later that sometimes aliveness or vitality can manifest in weaker forms than those of our automatic habits.

As Schnabel commented: “...if the performer became one with the music the audience would feel it, while if he tried to play *to* an audience, he would not be able to do full justice to the music”.<sup>75</sup> If performers have not purified their minds solely for music, they are not ready to vitalize music. Habits, past experience, eagerness for showing off or fear for correctness should not dominate a performer’s mentality. Such a domination would lead to the danger of being automatic or mechanic and thus blocked off from vitality.

Let’s go back to the example of Jiro Ono's sushi-making from the introduction of our project. As we asserted there, whether it be workers in iPhone factories, or housewives who feel themselves enslaved by repetitive domestic work, there is a danger lying in work as repetition.

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<sup>74</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.114; John Browning: American pianist, educator

<sup>75</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p.16

But apparently for Jiro Ono, and likewise for all other craftsmans with Shokunin spirit whose work on a daily basis consists mainly of repetitions, not only do they not become depressed, but they even gain a sort of higher peace and satisfaction from their work, without the necessity to find “fresh needs” elsewhere, according to Schopenhauer’s notion of boredom.

Sometimes, productivity might be disguised as vibrancy, while in truth it is only being occupied by things automatically. Repetition, on the other hand can be under the disguise of an immobile impression of stillness, although in reality it is embracing the spirit of life. This is in accordance of Annie Dillard’s experience of meditation which we discussed in our introduction as well. We see that in order to be alive, we often assume that we need to do more, and only by doing more might one find in return a sense of security. However, this is not always the case. The main purpose of this project is to recognize that although a genius would never be able to grow without persistence in practise, from the moment when a genius stops listening to her inner self, and as a result tightens herself up with things like restrictions, fear, rules, correctness and so on, things that exist outside of music, then whether she repeats the same gesture a hundred times, or a thousand times, her genius doesn’t grow. These meaningless repetitions even risk transforming her into a machine.

What we call here a peaceful mindset would enable artists to concentrate on their state of being, no matter the work they are preparing or the stage of preparation in which they find themselves. Aliveness would come only when one removes all intermediate tools. The actor He Bin commented that “The greatness of the theater artist Shizhi Yu, which only after so many years now do I start to realize, is that he never tried to please the audience on stage”, by paying less attention to the irrelevant, which often is considered hard for many of us, artists subsequently can be truly connected in the moment with the natural flow of art; there is no

interruption standing there as a barrier. If the performer, “became one with the music the audience would feel it, while if he tried to play *to* an audience, he would not be able to do full justice to the music”, as Schnabel also thinks. This purified mindset is the assurance to do full justice to music on stage, and in practise as well. The goal for practise is music itself, instead of music *for* the audience or authorities. The purity of a natural musical flow would come only when we concentrate exclusively on music.

In east, peaceful mindset is often highlighted. One of the key notion in Bergson’s philosophy, *élan vital*, which is what we have been addressed so far as “aliveness” or “vitality”, find its equivalent or similar term in Chinese philosophy as “Chi”.<sup>76</sup> We will introduce the philosophy *élan vital* in our next part: *Elan Vital*.

The emphasis on Chi is widespread in the Chinese art world, if “a Chinese painting lacks Chi, it is a dead work. As He Xie(479-502) listed the *Vivid Spirit*(气韵生动), as primary elements in *Six principles of Chinese painting*”.<sup>77</sup> In calligraphy, we also see that people think it is not only “the arrangement of brush strokes that determines its artistic value. It is also the display of...the vital energy or qi[Chi] that the artist has transferred into the art which makes it unique”.<sup>78</sup> In order to prepare oneself for the process of making art within this vitality, which has

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<sup>76</sup>According to Steven Taylor: “The Chinese word for this 'life energy' is Chi, and acupuncture and the exercises of Chi Gung and T'ai Chi are based on it.” Similarly, Stanley D. Wilson wrote: “Qi is what the French philosopher would called *élan vital*...”(p.6). See Steven Taylor, *The Elan Vital and Self-Evolution*. New Renaissance, Volume 8, Number 4, Issue 27; Wilson, Stanley D. *Qi Gong for Beginners: Eight Easy Movements for Vibrant Health*. New York: Sterling, 2007.

<sup>77</sup> “*On Chi and Chinese Painting*”(气与中国画画面的艺术表现).

<<http://art.people.com.cn/n/2015/0527/c396041-27065469.html>> [translated by author]

Xie He stated that if an painting is without this “vivid spirit”, there is no need to look further. For more information refer to “Six principles of Chinese painting,” *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Six\\_principles\\_of\\_Chinese\\_painting&oldid=773587177](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Six_principles_of_Chinese_painting&oldid=773587177)> (accessed April 29, 2018).

<sup>78</sup> Steven Luo. “Qi in Calligraphy,” Qi Encyclopedia. <<http://qi-encyclopedia.com/?article=Qi%20in%20Calligraphy>> (accessed April, 2018)

always been considered as the primary or one of the most crucial elements in artworks, one has to first of all be in a peaceful state of mind, aware of the flow of vitality. Chongyang Wang wrote that: “Cultivation [with Chi] won’t work if the heart is not set in peace, the mind not cleared...Set your heart in peace, then existence will show itself”.<sup>79</sup> If we read this quote through the lens that Bergson has provided us, then what we have to clear away first in our mind, is the materials that our intellect collects for us, and, what’s more, set the heart in peace so that the fluidity of creation would come by and of itself.

While we are cultivating our technique, learning the necessary knowledge for performance, we should also cultivate our inner peace, one that would allow that, no matter the implications of the environment or audience, those moments at which one can “feel that the public is just waiting for your slightest mistake”,<sup>80</sup> one can nevertheless be willing to make music and embrace creation in the moment of performance.

For Bergson, there is no way we can depart from material to arrive at creation, as we will see in the next part. And the same order applies here, only with a peaceful mindset will our inner sympathy and intuition be brought to work.

We have already seen that intuition is sympathy. Now it’s time to explore and study their relationship to Bergson’s most important philosophical notion: *Elan vital*.

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<sup>79</sup> Chongyang Wang(王重阳): “*Kacks for inner cultivation*” (内修真诀)

One version is available through *International KungFu Web*.

<<http://ru.qgfw.com/KungfuArticleList2.aspx?KungfuArticleID=2828>> [translated by author]

<sup>80</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.53

## v) Élan Vital

“The virtuoso is not a mason who, chisel in hand, faithfully and conscientiously whittles stone after the design of an architect. He is not a passive tool reproducing feeling and thought and adding nothing of himself. He is not the (more or less) experienced reader of works which have no margins for his notes, which allow for no paragraphing between the lines... He is called upon to make emotion speak, and weep, and sing, and sigh--to bring it to life in his consciousness. He creates as the composer himself created, for he himself must live the passions he will call to light in all their brilliance. He breathes life into the lethargic body, infuses it with fire, enlivens it with the pulse of grace and charm. He changes the earthly form into a living being, penetrating it with the spark which Prometheus snatched from Jupiter's flesh. He must send the form he has created soaring into transparent ether: he must arm it with a thousand winged weapons: he must call up scent and blossom, and breath of life”<sup>81</sup>

Franz Liszt

In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson showed that the two main diverging tendencies that account for the evolution of life can ultimately be identified as intuition on the one hand and intelligence on the other.<sup>82</sup> As we have seen before, duration is a way of conceiving time that allows for the intervention of free will, as opposed to mathematical, geometric time which seems to be ruled by fate. Human intelligence grants us the ability to analyze what has happened and predict what will happen. But duration never goes back, never extracts a certain moment from the past, because once this is done, the moment is no longer the same thing. To reproduce the

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<sup>81</sup> Friedheim and Bullock. *Life and Liszt*, p.52

<sup>82</sup> *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, V



wholeness of aliveness after the fact or to predict it beforehand are, for Bergson, impossible endeavors. In *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson makes it clear that it is never possible to revisit a previous moment: “there are no two identical moments in the life of the same conscious being...because the second moment always contains, over and above the first, the memory that the first has bequeathed to it”.<sup>83</sup> Thus for Bergson, there is no present consciousness without memory, the memory of past moments is what makes the present. “It is this which constitutes duration”.<sup>84</sup> Not only is it not possible to revisit the past, for Bergson it is also impossible to predict the future: “On ne prévoit de l'avenir que ce qui ressemble au passé ou ce qui est recomposable avec des éléments semblables à ceux du passé”.<sup>85</sup> We can thus see that for Bergson, to have all the same elements of aliveness is impossible, so “les systèmes que nous y découpons n'en seraient point alors, à proprement parler, des parties ; ce seraient des vues partielles prises sur le tout”, and even all of these parts added together cannot obtain “même pas un commencement de recomposition de l'ensemble”.<sup>86</sup> The only moment when duration is the same point as the other one is to live through it again, but if one lives it again, it will be still be another new form of life that is different from the previous one, however similar the two might look. If we want “...the system of today actually to be superimposed on that of yesterday, the latter must have *waited* for the former, time must have halted...[This] happens in geometry, but in geometry alone”.<sup>87</sup> Man’s intelligence thus is capable of, and only capable of understanding

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<sup>83</sup> Bergson, Henri, and T. E. Hulme. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*. New York and London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons. 1912. p.12-13

<sup>84</sup> Bergson and Hulme. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, p.44

<sup>85</sup> Bergson, Henri: *L'évolution créatrice*. Electronic edition by Gemma Paquet. A collection developed in collaboration with La Bibliothèque Paul-Émile-Boulet in University of Québec à Chicoutimi, 2002.

<[http://classiques.ugac.ca/classiques/bergson\\_henri/evolution\\_creatrice/evolution\\_creatrice.html](http://classiques.ugac.ca/classiques/bergson_henri/evolution_creatrice/evolution_creatrice.html)> p.27

<sup>86</sup> Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p.28

<sup>87</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.216

the immobile, the part which *wait*, the part which is from the surface or singular angle as opposed to the whole. Just like when Brendel is molding his interpretation and conception for a piece, he would “play as instinctively as possible”, “only later do I attempt to understand what I am doing”.<sup>88</sup> For Brendel, music starts from intuition, the only effort he applied is to trust the fluidity. The role of intelligence should not intervene because it breaks the whole into parts, it might give us useful results that would satisfy our needs, but ultimately, it can never produce life.

The only solution to absolutely understand a thing in whole is to rejoin the force that originates it. This vital force, what Bergson calls the *élan vital*, is the origin of life. It is “la formidable poussée intérieure qui devait les hausser jusqu'aux formes supérieures de la vie. Qu'en vertu de cette poussée les premiers organismes aient cherché à grandir le plus possible”.<sup>89</sup> It is this energy and impulse that acts through duration and has created, in the process of the evolution of life, various creatures.

This vital force is preserved fragmentarily within human intuition. The distinction between intuition and intelligence also lies in the opposition between qualitative and quantitative multiplicities as mentioned above in relation to duration. Intellectual analysis has the quantitative traits that prevent humanity from accessing the qualitative essence of vital impulse. This essence and wholeness of life is only accessible to the opposite end of intelligence, namely intuition.

For Bergson, it is through intuition that we arrived at our intellect and analyzed and collated all our knowledge, not the other way around, and no matter how “vague and above all

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<sup>88</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.91

<sup>89</sup> Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p.66

discontinuous” intuition is.<sup>90</sup> In this age where everything moves fast, we would naturally prefer things that would be guaranteed to have instant benefits, or are assured to be efficient. The ability of the intellect to satisfy our needs thus becomes incredibly emphasized. It is good for us to be reminded by someone like Bergson that: “...we place ourselves in intuition in order to go from the intuition to intellect, for from the intellect, we shall never pass to intuition”<sup>91</sup>. All the intellect and knowledge stuffed in our head might make us more practical, more professional, and sometimes enable us to learn something quicker. But ultimately it is not the path directed to aliveness, or *élan vital*.

When Dubal asked Brendel, who “enjoys the reputation of being a profoundly analytic musician”, if he ever feels that too much “academic knowledge” will hurt interpretation, Brendel admitted that he would play “as instinctively as possible” at first, “only later do I attempt to understand what I am doing, why I am doing it.” Bergson and Brendel have both demonstrated to us that it is impossible to reverse this order, because instinct and intuition contain much more that knowledge can grasp. And yet, a performer’s education never really emphasizes the role of intuition; indeed, it rather tends to overly emphasize the role of analytical ability. Schnabel, too, thinks that “fruitful analysis is the result of spontaneous reaction to some musical detail...”.<sup>92</sup> We often fail to pay attention to this praise of intuition on the part of accomplished musicians. In my humble experience, it is this spontaneous reaction within me that has often served as my best teacher wherever I come across musical problems. We will encounter them in more detail in Chapter III.

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<sup>90</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.267

<sup>91</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.268

<sup>92</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p.18-19

Let's remember what Browning observed from his teaching, namely that "most students...are emotionally constricted...whatever freedom they may have in their lives...doesn't apply to the music".<sup>93</sup> One might propose based on this quote and what we've seen in the previous pages is that the classical music education system has overemphasized *destruction* to the detriment of *creation*, which cannot be "in any way subject to a mathematical treatment..."<sup>94</sup> Classical music requires an incredible amount of work that one needs to master first, but this process should not be done outside of music, and in fact, at the moment we keep our eyes only upon what the intellect tells us, we fall into a trap---we fail to recognize that these things, on their own, are meaningless without "élan vital" of music.

It might be difficult for professionals to accept this idea, because through training they are used to approaching a piece of music beginning with their intellect. As a result of this sort of education focusing on analysis, we would have more and more professional players whose artistry, originality and personality have to be sacrificed for proficiency in study. Artists should use tools, no matter how hard the tool is to master, to say things they want to say, not what tools want them to say.

One of the possible ways to rediscover the vitality in music is to re-emphasize intuition's role in music, since it has been not only left aside, but is even considered as the most unreliable or harmful thing that prevents performers from being professional or getting instant benefits. It is thus worth reflecting upon the question of intuition, the reason why it is weak like "a lamp almost extinguished, which only glimmers now and then, for a few moments at most. But it glimmers wherever a vital interest is at stake".<sup>95</sup> It glimmers:

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<sup>93</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.114

<sup>94</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.20

<sup>95</sup> Bergson, Henri, and Arthur Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1913.p.267

on our personality, on our liberty, on the place which we occupy in the whole of nature, on our origin and perhaps also on our destiny, it throws a light feeble and vacillating, but which nonetheless pierces the darkness of the night in which the intellect leaves us.<sup>96</sup>

If we do not protect intuition, but instead try to blot it out in order to make place for something that is more “secure” and “reliable”, we are left in the dark night of a world of proficiency, without the chance to glimpse the first light of true artistic freedom. Intuition, in most cases, is our artistic self, whereas our education creates for us a critical self. This artistic self should not be despised, but should be treasured, if not more, then as much as all other elements of knowledge that education has taught us. Only when we are ourselves in intuition, when we let ourselves be guided and supervised by our inner artistic self, then all of the intellect we have becomes meaningful.

If music loses its intuition or, through the process of learning, intuition, which has preserved the original impulse of life according to Bergson, becomes tortured and extinguished, then, Bergson would warn us, the intellect now is not only pointless, but also harmful. That is what Bergson’s philosophy might inspire performers to rethink.

#### vi) “Safety last”

“...on stage, you have to take chance to make the music really live”.<sup>97</sup>

Vladimir Horowitz

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<sup>96</sup> Bergson, Henri, and Arthur Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1913. p.268

<sup>97</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.206

There are many situations in practise which the question of security arises. The ideology of “security” and being “reliable”, as we have seen before, oftentimes is pursued at the cost of one’s artistic self. We might sometimes play something really well once, and then we try to remember what we did, counting on the movement produced just now to give the same results in the future, and forever. Because we think instincts are unreliable, and various things might happen during a live performance to destabilize us, we count on physical analysis to secure things in their place. The ideology of taking risks, in spite of being heroic, always means potential damage to proficiency.

When performers play in competitions for example, who would dare to take risks for music? Competitors “cannot do anything that could be considered controversial by any one of...[the judges]; they cannot do anything that could be considered a personal idea...as a result...you hear one, ten, thirty young pianists and they’re all alike,” as J. Bolet remarked.<sup>98</sup> Under this context, competition can be a mutual harm for both judges and competitors. Judges are bored by sitting there 6 hours a day, sometimes much longer, listening to performances that might be full of “clichés”. It is undeniable that there are powerful performers who are strong enough to present music with their vitality, but most competitors are fettered by the sirs and ladies among the judges supervising and judging them from above. Everyone blames the game of music competitions, yet the game keeps going, and even expands, with all participants continuing their roles in it with pride.

To some degree, music competitions foster a certain mechanistic approach to music. “In examinations theoretical knowledge is tested abstractly, and bravura is assessed in piano competitions by what Schnabel called the ‘*measurable quantities*’(speed of octaves and such)”.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.79

<sup>99</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p.23

Schnabel might have been unfamiliar with Bergson's philosophy, but he used an exactly Bergsonian expression: "measurable quantities". Bergson might have appended to Schnabel's comment by noting that: "measuring is a wholly human operation...we...superpose two objects one on another...Nature does not measure, nor does it count".<sup>100</sup> In competitions, music strays far from its nature. Winners of competitions, before engaging with music, first have to be perfect in all "positions", "measurable quantities" that people can take hold of for judgement. These positions -- which include correct notes, rhythm, style, sound quality, tone, vibratos, and the list can go on forever -- have ruined the qualitative reality of music. Under this large frame of restrictions, how convincing the music is already becomes a less important factor. Performances that are "stable and square" are the most secure ones in competition, for they don't make anyone unhappy just like they don't make anybody particularly happy.

These "Measurable quantities" emphasized by competitions and considered as more important than vital qualities, can do great harm to music. Yet, performers allow themselves to be restricted. "Safety last", is what Schnabel would have told his students. We think it is fine to pay attention to "positions", but just as Schnabel would praise his students "when for musical reasons they took technical risks",<sup>101</sup> untrust and contempt for mere instinct have been commonly accepted due to instinct's unsteadiness. In the end, one tries desperately to secure, preserve, and copy the music while ignoring the mobility of the ultimate flow. Safety here becomes paramount. In the following section, we thus want to explore the courage and trust one requires to embrace the moment of life, intuition and one's inner artistic self in a professional world in which instability has become an object of contempt .

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<sup>100</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.218

<sup>101</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p.24

## vii) Trust

As we explained before, both this part and part iv) on peace can serve as a two part discussion about two mindsets from a psychological approach. In reality, these two mindsets do not necessarily appear in the order we introduced in this project. In general, what we mean by trust consists of the following two aspects:

1. Trust in intuition
2. Giving up correctness and security

We have already exemplified in our previous section, *Safety last*, the second aspect about giving up the correctness and security for music. Here we will mainly concentrate on trust in intuition. Once we set ourselves in a peaceful mindset (as we discussed in part iv), our physical movement, and musical instincts (part v) oftentimes attain the essence to the music. Here, one needs to trust the process without recourse to intelligence, just as we have seen that Brendel would at first, when getting into a piece: “play as instinctively as possible”.<sup>102</sup> Music starts from intuition, the only effort Brendel applied was trust in fluidity. The role of intelligence should not intervene, because it would break the whole into parts.

Fanny Howe described in a talk about allowing bewilderment in writing: “For myself, a poem emerges by itself...letting the lines cohere on their own volition is crucial...it is like watching someone else take form in the dark and I am weirdly disassociated from the action...”.<sup>103</sup> This process is similar to the process we address here as trust. It expresses my personal experience of learning a new piece. I begin by practicing extremely slowly, and my critical self is temporarily closed. All the nuances in music appear vividly to me. If here my

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<sup>102</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.91

<sup>103</sup> Howe, Fanny. “*Bewilderment*.” This talk is excerpted from a longer version presented 9/25/98 on the Poetics & Readings Series, sponsored by Small Press Traffic at New College, San Francisco; Fanny Howe American poet, novelist



critical self opens up, I break my intuition with knowledge from the past, and the process is stopped. This has been my own process, which I have found it works every time I start a new piece.

Bergson gives an example of this:

...if I raise my hand from A to B... felt from within, it is a simple, indivisible act; perceived from without, it is a certain curve, AB. In this curve I can distinguish as many positions as I please...But the positions... have sprung automatically from the indivisible act by which my hand has gone from A to B...Both mechanism and finalism would leave on one side *the movement*, which is the reality itself...something else which is neither order nor position but is essential, the mobility.<sup>104</sup>

We see that intuition sometimes can be very subtle. In Bergson's philosophy, it is always impossible to analyze the whole movement. Where mechanism and finalism are both mistaken, in Bergson's opinion, is that they leave the movement, the mobility, which is the essence, on the side. "We can only grasp the ends of an interval but not the interval itself", says Bergson.<sup>105</sup> Thus in order to make meaningful music, one has to be deeply involved in the the music, inside the interval.

This involvement sometimes is like "a poem emerging by itself" according to Howe's description. This would also resonate with Schnabel's idea of objectivity: "...all interpretive re-creation depends on...[the]objective character of a composition".<sup>106</sup> A mechanical understanding of this "objectivity" would lead to the opposite of "being involved". We have to notice that this "objectivity", to let a composition speak for itself, is actually the deepest possible involvement. It is the involvement in which neither the ego nor other disturbances from the

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<sup>104</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.90-91

<sup>105</sup> Allan Miller, *Barenboim on Beethoven: Masterclass*, (December 4, 2007; EMI Classics), DVD.

<sup>106</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p.15

performer intervene. Thus to trust and to follow the natural movement, without “adding” things to it, sometimes is the key to presenting music with vitality.

Trust does not only concern music but for our physical condition in playing as well. Physically, the body also needs to trust its most natural gestures. If one has lots of tension in the body while playing, the music reflects this and comes across as very troubled, making it difficult to present “music as itself”. One’s physical condition is always connected with the music one is producing.

One of my teachers in the past introduced a “relaxing exercise” to me when she noticed that sometimes I have tension physically. I let gravity down to the the keyboard, and then quickly play a group of 16th notes within one gesture. The only thing I need to do in the exercise is to “trust this gesture”. I found it helpful as I tend to create extra effort, and thus make music more complicated simultaneously if I lack of this basic trust.

This trust is not limited only to practise, but must also be included in performance. Lots of musicians have noticed a lack of aliveness in a recording session compared to live performance. Jorge Bolet commented that recording often destroys what he called “music making” as opposed to just “piano playing”. Recording destroys real music because in a recording “any slight imperfection in a performance is not tolerated.”<sup>107</sup> Imperfection is part of the nature of aliveness. And in fact, the concept of imperfection oftentimes is actually associated with the concept of homogeneous space, which “ne peut qu’enfermer les faits...dans des cadres préexistants qu’elle considère comme définitifs...non pas une vision directe de son objet”,<sup>108</sup> it is not the “direct vision” of music any more. The application of perfection or correctness closes the possibility for a direct vision of life in Bergson’s philosophy. Thus taking risks, embracing the

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<sup>107</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.79

<sup>108</sup> Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p.5

moment in performance is essential for a musician, just as, in Bergson, for something to be alive, it must remain unpredictable. The beauty of music shouldn't be replaced by the pursuit of security.

*Rubato* can provide us with another example of the importance of trust in intuition. A “genius” rubato can only be done within performers themselves. Rules are insufficient and useless. P.Tortelier commented in Pablo Casal's rubato: “that was sheer poetry...it is not studied, not planned. It is the intuitive awareness of the relativity of notes in every direction...You feel in the moment of performance that one note should be given a little more time than another”.<sup>109</sup> Tortelier thinks the fact that Casal had studied composing helped his feeling for rubato. We agree that training in composition might more easily inspire sense of creation and a necessary trust in creation. But in practice, too, we believe it is also about creation. Practising rubato for example is about getting to a point of fluidity at which music is created in the moment as a result of the performer's trust. The subtleness of rubato is impossible to be perceived by the intellect. The most “logical” rubato, as one can analyze as such after it's done, can only be produced when musical intuition is trusted.

In music like Mozart's, in which the notes can be correctly reproduced at a beginner level, the difficulty in performing the music stems from its simplicity. Or as Paul Badura-Skoda, one of my favorite musicians once put it: “In Mozart, there's something which you cannot grasp intellectually, there is something ultimately mysterious...”<sup>110</sup> Trust in intuition becomes crucial here if one doesn't want to sound like “an elephant carefully standing on an eggshell”, as pianist Fou TS'ong commented on another famous musician when playing Mozart.<sup>111</sup> Real control does

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<sup>109</sup> Tortelier and Blum. *Paul Tortelier*, p.100

<sup>110</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.54

<sup>111</sup> Fu, Min. *Looking towards 70*, [translated by author].

not exist if the performer lacks trust. In a sense, trust consists of renouncing certain control in order to let the music become alive by and of itself, as if observing from a distance. This trust in intuition, which can help us connect with *élan vital*, currently goes against common musical education. It needs to be noted and recognized more.

### **viii) Integration & Oneness**

Let us read now reread this phrase from Bergson: “If I raise my hand from A to B...felt from within, it is a simple, indivisible act”. We have exemplified before the reason these positions are not the movement itself. But this simple act from A to B is the integration of all the positions. If we look at this movement with sympathy, with a purified mind, and we now see this single action AB appear as a simple gesture. With the same mindset of peace and trust, I am able to do another indivisible motion from C to D. Now if we perceive this new curve from without, we would find different positions than the original movement from A to B. But this new gesture is still alive with its new form of individualism. In a way, this is the meaning of practise. For practise is not about ensuring the AB movement every time, it is through each movement, reinforced the gesture from within. There would never be an absolutely identical movement like A to B again, if we testify them after, using curves and positions.

Here, at last, we finally come to integration and oneness from our problematic place of departure where separations dominated.

Once, in my lesson, my teacher commented that all my playing sounds correct, but he felt a distance. He used the metaphor that it is like I am in a zoo watching tigers from a distance. I asked if he wanted me to be with the tiger together inside the cage, and my teacher replied: “I want you to be the tiger”. As we can see here, this is a point at which teachers can no longer

teach “positions”. Although we recognize that “extremely capable teachers”, as Brendel would say, might do a better job of inspiring their students than others, it is obvious here that the most simple solution to connect with *élan vital* in music is to awaken the teacher that dwells within oneself, a teacher consisting of one’s intuition, sympathy, and trust in the natural flow of music.

This whole project is not about denying the fact that we are human beings and proposing instead that we are tigers. It is not an idealistic project but rather the opposite: it is about revealing “true reality” according to Bergson. While we are focusing on positions, we are actually remaining far away from reality itself which is movement, essential mobility. This is what I have called aliveness throughout this project, the vitality or the impetus (*élan vital*) that lies at the heart of music. What does music become when it lacks its essence? The answer to this question might be even more problematic than all the extremes I exemplified in the beginning of this chapter.

Now that we have explained the salient traits of Bergson’s philosophy and its possible connection to various musicians’ problem, we are now ready to go on to the next and final chapter, where we will delve deeper into a performer’s method of practising and continue to explore Bergson’s ideology there. But before we leave this chapter, I want to clarify one more issue in order to prevent any theoretical misunderstanding.

#### **ix) Intellect’s role & Bergson’s aspiration**

It would be to misunderstand Bergson to think that he is creating a dichotomy between *élan vital* and human intelligence, to believe that he seeks to do away with the disregard for instinct by placing intelligence in contempt. We have seen him use the term “several” in order to describe multiplicities, and even though he felt that the word is an inaccurate means of

communicating his idea, he still felt he had to use it.<sup>112</sup> We have to keep in mind that in describing his philosophy, which ultimately is about integration, he has to use separation and distinctions in order for people to realize the problem, since: “nous ne dépassons pas notre intelligence, puisque c'est avec notre intelligence, à travers notre intelligence, que nous regardons encore les autres formes de la conscience”.<sup>113</sup> It would be to misread him to think that he just wants unrealistic spontaneity, which doesn't require further cultivation and, in any case, does not exist in this earthly world. What Bergson wants is not to abandon the intellect, but through rediscovering and re-emphasizing the role of élan vital, distinct dichotomies can be surpassed. A healthy relationship with music is one in which intellect works for intuition. In other words, the intellect thus also becomes part of this natural impetus.

According to Bergson, the theory of knowledge and the theory of life should come together, they:

se poussent l'une l'autre indéfiniment...si elles réussissaient dans leur entreprise commune...elles substituerait au faux évolutionnisme de Spencer, - qui consiste à découper la réalité actuelle, déjà évoluée, en petits morceaux non moins évolués, puis à la recomposer avec ces fragments, et à se donner ainsi, par avance, tout ce qu'il s'agit d'expliquer, un évolutionnisme vrai, où la réalité serait suivie dans sa génération et sa croissance.<sup>114</sup>

This quote is found at the end of the introduction for *L'Évolution créatrice*. Here Bergson explains his true aspiration for the future of thought, which, in line with the purpose of my project, is not to turn away from the intellect, but rather to create something that is combined, integrated and thus more natural. For only under this unification can genius dwell and grow. This is an idea that true musicians like Brendel, Schnabel, Toteillier and many others, would agree with. In other words, we want to use Bergson's philosophy in this project to encourage

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<sup>112</sup> *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, II

<sup>113</sup> Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p.9

<sup>114</sup> Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p.5

performers to embrace their artistic self, just as they have embraced their intellects through knowledge.

### CHAPTER III Inside practise

“... repetition which serves as the base of our generalizations is essential in the physical order, accidental in the vital order. The physical order is ‘automatic;’ the vital order is, I will not say voluntary, but analogous to the order ‘willed’”.<sup>115</sup>

“Real duration is that duration which...changes inwardly, and the same concrete reality never recurs”.<sup>116</sup>

“...the present moment of a living body does not find its explanation in the moment immediately before...”.<sup>117</sup>

“Long before being artists, we are artisans, and all fabrication...lives on likeness and repetition...Fabrication works on models which it sets out to reproduce, and even when it invents,

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<sup>115</sup> Bergson, Henri, and Arthur Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*. New York, NY: Henry Hold and Company, 1913. p.231

<sup>116</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.46

<sup>117</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.20

it proceeds, or imagines itself to proceed, by a new arrangement of elements already known. Its principle is that ‘we must have like to produce like’.<sup>118</sup>

Henri Bergson

### i) Repetition

It is easy to make practise a mere calculative and mechanical process. We practise through repetitions, but “repetition is...possible only in the abstract: what is repeated is some aspect that our senses, and especially our intellect, have singled out from reality...”.<sup>119</sup> Practicing mere repetition would not make one have the technique of becoming a musician but maybe, in Bergson’s word, “an artisan”. Repetition takes the fundamental vitality away.

M. Argerich has said every technique embodied in a particular piece is different. “Jamais”, is the answer she said to Charles Dutoit, when he asked if she ever practise scales. In her opinion, there is no way to generalize or categorize a certain technique and practise it alone. Every octave calls for a completely different technique in individual musical composition. Because technique draws its life from the music in which it finds itself, she doesn’t recommend practising scales, because scales, for her, are mere repetitions without life.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.45

<sup>119</sup> Bergson, Henri, and Arthur Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*. New York, NY: Henry Hold and Company, 1913. p.231

<sup>120</sup> Nicolas Bardey. “Martha Argerich - Technique pianistique (1972)”. YouTube video, 01:00. Posted [September 2016] <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wD1rn-0ei9o>>.



If for Bergson “life transcends intellect”,<sup>121</sup> here we propose that music transcend tools. As we keep emphasizing in this project, tools are ultimately nothing but tools, and it don’t necessarily lead to music. These tools are applied to a physical orders which lies outside of music. Only tools can be repeated in reality. Thus if one seeks oneself only among tools, one gets lost in tools.

## **ii) A personal experience**

In Bach’s music, in general, if one chooses a particular articulation for a certain group of notes on a melodic line, or musical motivation, or each subject in a fugue, then one is taught to kept the same articulation for this same musical group throughout the piece. For example, if one decides staccato as the articulation for eighth notes, then this same staccato approach should be applied to other groups of eighth notes as well. This completely fits Bach’s musical style, and can effectively make each group of notes independent, characterized and well distinguished from each other, for Bach is the master of counterpoint. It also helps to make Bach’s music reappear vividly because it accords with the traits of the instruments in his time. These keyboard instruments (clavichord, harpsichord, organ...) were not as “colorful” as modern pianos which can produce lots of nuances of colorful tone. The sound of his instruments are fairly black and white, and have a very clear, distinguishable quality. None of the sounds should be in the grey area, whereas modern pianos can produce easily in the grey areas between the “black and white”.

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<sup>121</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.46

Playing each motivation using distinguishable articulation helps to make the clarity of the sound and style resemble what must have been heard in Bach's time. We all know composers sometimes would compose for their ideal imaginative instrument, which sometimes made them think ahead, but most of the time, as Harnoncourt commented: "if Mozart had known the modern piano, he would have composed something totally different",<sup>122</sup> he would probably not have composed the music he did but something else. One remembers the relationship between Chopin and his Frayre. For composers, the instrument inspired the music. So reproducing the traits of the original instrument would help to make the composers' music more vivid. Another benefit this regulation would bring is that it would also help to unify the whole piece more logically; by making each of its groups obvious, it would help to build the whole piece's development and thus reinforce the structure of it. But there is almost never "always" in music, as we've seen before when we addressed musical correctness, or when Bergson stated that people transform aspects from the "vital order" into the "physical order".<sup>123</sup>

Normally, one way of resolving the problem is to introduce more and more new regulations in music, in order to overcome the blind corners the older ones turned out to be. Maybe the time has come for us to acknowledge that the importance and the essence of the vital order is ultimately accidental in music. A mind stuffed with rules only inhibits a person from being a real musician.

Intuition does not reduce proficiency by proposing that one be impractical, instead it makes the musician even more professional. Intuition is not emphasized at all as it should, for if

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<sup>122</sup> *Mission Mozart: Lang Lang and Nikolaus Harnoncourt*. Directed by Christian Berger. 2014. Medici.tv. <<https://www.medici.tv/en/documentaries/lang-lang-and-nikolaus-harnoncourt-mission-mozart-christian-berger/>>.

<sup>123</sup> Bergson, Henri, and Arthur Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*. New York, NY: Henry Hold and Company, 1913. p.231

the musician knows how to “seize, first to sustain them, then to expand the intuitions and so unite them together....the more it advances in this work, the more will it perceive that intuition is...life itself”.<sup>124</sup> According to this logic, a performer would only be the most professional musician, and have the most secure performance for music each time, if he or she has the ability to welcome intuition in the most natural manner and with psychological confidence.

But the process of “seizing, sustaining and expanding intuition”, however, does not equal generalization. The latter is what Bergson would criticize under the name of “human intellect”. The biggest difference is that one is on the side of liberation, while the other is on the side of restriction and “descending” the life to materials.<sup>125</sup> Sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference between the two because liberation can wear the mask of restriction and vice versa. But if we only emphasize practical intellect, then the part where it gradually becomes imprisonment would be ignored. Even though restrictions claim to produce ultimate liberation for us, in reality, what has happened is that our “intuition is, in fact, almost completely sacrificed to intellect”.<sup>126</sup> If the practical things are not being supervised and guided under intuition, and if intuition is sacrificed completely to intellect, which is usually the case, then all the practical things the intellect collected would only lead to the death of music.

We are going to exemplify how these ideas work in reality through an experience of mine. When I am playing Bach’s Keyboard Partita No.3 in A minor, the opening dance *Fantasia* has three eighth notes of *accompagnamento* in the left hand, which I decided to play with a staccato articulation.

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<sup>124</sup> Bergson, Henri, and Arthur Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*. New York, NY: Henry Hold and Company, 1913. p.268

<sup>125</sup> This idea of “descending” can be found in p.8, 269, 324 in Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*. Henry Hold and Company, 1913.

<sup>126</sup> Bergson, Henri, and Arthur Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*. New York, NY: Henry Hold and Company, 1913. p.267



Figure 2. Steglich, Rudolf, ed. *J.S.BACH Partiten 1-3*. Munchen, Germany: G.Henle Verlag, n.d. p.36

It makes sense with the right hand's following 8th note group with well. Together the 8th notes and 16th notes form two voices, neither of which is accompagnamento. But later, when these same 16th notes and the 8th notes are two independent voice motivations translated to another place, I automatically do it with the same staccato for the 8th notes as well, like the beginning. There are, however, times while practising the piece when I have a strong feeling comes over me -- which, by the way, I would not notice if I were under any form of mental tension --, that if I play these new 8th notes longer it would speak to me more powerfully. And yet I don't allow myself to do it because it feels self-indulgent, and self-indulgence always has the potential of causing troubled performances.



Figure 2. Steglich, Rudolf, ed. *J.S.BACH Partiten 1-3*. Munchen, Germany: G.Henle Verlag, n.d. p.36

Thus at first it feels that, although it makes me comfortable, it is something I shouldn't do. I struggle then because my intuition actually becomes stronger and stronger, but at the same

time, this intuition does not make any sense to me by only making this single place longer, in the entire piece embodied with the same motivations. It is not justifiable enough for me in the sense of this piece's overall logical picture.

As I was practicing this piece and struggling against my intuition, I heard a recording whose interpretation had a similar tendency to my “unjustifiable” and “vague” musical intuition. The recording was made by Glenn Gould, and in the same place where I was disturbed, he demonstrated to me the maximum version of my intuition by playing the group of eighth notes as complete legato, thereby creating a singing melody. By doing so, this particular place right away stands out and differs from all other similar musical materials in the rest of piece. This little place was integrated within the overall fluid energy of the whole piece with a completely convincing logic. One would never doubt the legibility of his approach because of the strong vital force found in his Bach.

Gould's Bach has the ability to justify its musical ideas themselves because Gould is widely considered a genius. Now this type of performance often creates a headache for people who prefer to take easy solutions from the intellect, because for them, these performances are too unique and too genius to be justified intellectually. They are impossible to duplicate and uncatchable by analysis. Thus, a teacher would desperately warn their students never to try to study from such a performance.

Now here they would use Bergson's ideology to defend themselves. That is, geniuses have the ability to be more liberated, because of their high level of mastery in music. This ability can even make places where they violated little rules into convincing performances within the vitality of music. It thus is dangerous for students to imitate only partially. “Ce n'est plus la réalité même”, said these professors, like Bergson, “mais seulement une imitation du réel, ou

plutôt une image symbolique; l'essence des choses nous échappe et nous échappera toujours.”

Imitation can't copy the reality of the original music. “Mais”, continued Bergson, “c'est vraiment, après beaucoup d'orgueil pour l'intelligence humaine, un excès d'humilité”.<sup>127</sup> This is truly an excess of humility in regard to student's potential genius. They emphasize a mistrust of students' ability to take inspiration from the whole instead of from parts, without recognizing that a bad teacher's influence can be ten times more harmful than recordings. It is no longer common these days to see ten students who studied under the same teacher play the same music completely differently from each other, each one with his or her own strong personality. The prohibition of imitating recordings, under this context, is truly unnecessarily emphasized, to the point where it already starts to become a cliché to repeat it.

Is the purpose of anti-learning-from-recordings to protect students' originality, or is it actually just the most secure way to prevent students from doing crazy things and making musical “mistakes”? It ought to be noted that in the middle of pursuing music, if security always has a higher position than aliveness, if the latter, which comes together with risks, is always being prohibited in order to make a place for the former, then geniuses are very likely to be killed in the cradle without a chance to grow. One often complains that nowadays in the world of classical music, performances are becoming less and less original and “soulful”, less and less like the performances of Alfred Cortot, Ignaz Friedman or Edwin Fischer's time. We need to ask ourselves if all the restrictions and conventions are really serving liberation as they claim, or if in fact they are restricting the life of music itself? The modern world shouldn't have changed humanity into a completely different species yet, in which case a lack of originality must be attributed to an environment that no longer allows great artistry to grow, without fear. While I do

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<sup>127</sup> Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p.8

not intend to deny the correctness and effectiveness of the power of analysis, if it has stopped the impetus of music, if constantly we ignore our inner artistic self, which can be already as weak as “a lamp almost extinguished”,<sup>128</sup> and replace it with a critical self, which we are trained to do very early on, would we then have any chance to grow our artistic self to true artistry? Who knows if these artistries aren’t as alive as geniuses like Glenn Gould?

### iii) Patience for the process of integration

This is not to say, however, that the process of becoming familiar with a piece of music doesn’t have any “zigzag paths”. I am not trying to claim that everyone should give up a teacher’s suggestions in order to pursue a natural flow. It takes time for new ideas to grow, and this process would not be a linear path but more like what I would call a zig-zag path. Patience would be important here, for usually after lessons or masterclasses, new ideas or better interpretations would feel fairly unnatural at first. Musicians might feel more distanced and less connected to music after hearing the suggestions. It takes time for rules to feel natural.

A Chinese idiom best describes the situation: “tossing a brick to attract the jade” (拋磚引玉). People often use this idiom when making suggestions to others. The bricks imply the suggestions themselves, and the jade is all the possibilities of goodness other people would actually produce after seeing the bricks (after listening to the suggestions). Since jade is considered “a symbol of goodness, preciousness and beauty”,<sup>129</sup> this would mean that beauty

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<sup>128</sup> Bergson, Henri, and Arthur Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1913. p.268

<sup>129</sup> "The Importance of Jade Stone in Chinese Culture." *European Gemological Laboratory (EGL) Asia*. <[http://www.eglasia.com.hk/jade\\_culture.html](http://www.eglasia.com.hk/jade_culture.html)>.

already exists in other people's hearts before the existence of the bricks. Being told new ideas in music lessons is like bricks thrown in a student's face, bricks which might feel unnatural, extrinsic and painful. But its function is to induce beauty, the beauty of the artistic self which already dwells within students.

Breaking bad habits would not necessarily make us feel comfortable at first, but if after patience, dedication and persistence, we never manage to feel the "jade" and only see bricks everywhere in front of our sight, that is when we need Bergson's philosophy to help us. For example, in the documentary *Mission Mozart - Lang Lang & Nikolaus Harnoncourt*, Harnoncourt told Lang Lang not to do echo. This effort of echo is a popular method performers use to make a instant difference, when two musical phrases are written the same. One plays the first one louder, and the second one softer, like "a big monkey, and then a little monkey", as Barenboim told Lang Lang.<sup>130</sup> But sometimes, if the echo is too "man-made", if the effort is too obvious, echo itself becomes automatic. Many musicians don't recommend doing echos, for it is often done without a will to music, and becomes a cliché that everyone obeys.

Sometimes we are given contrasting opinions from different teachers. On the topic of echo, it is Barenboim's monkeys versus Harnoncourt's automatic cliché, instead of focusing on the rule told by another, it is the moment one could turn back to their "jade" inside their heart. The real understanding of a rule is to enter into the rule and understand it from within. Doing echo or not is actually not the important thing here, for those who told us to make echo would agree with Bergson that music should never be the same even when notes and phrases are the same. Similarly musicians who dislike to emphasize the effort of echo claim that "a work of

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<sup>130</sup> *Mission Mozart: Lang Lang and Nikolaus Harnoncourt*. Directed by Christian Berger. 2014. MediciTV. <<https://www.medici.tv/en/documentaries/lang-lang-and-nikolaus-harnoncourt-mission-mozart-christian-berger/>>.



art...shows a perfect order, and yet they can only be expressed in terms of ideas approximately and after the event”(p223.<sup>131</sup> Echo for them becomes an externalized perfect order for music.

Music goes away when applying it mechanically.

Echo is just one example, but it demonstrates that our jade, the beauty and artistic self dwelling inside us, should always guide us through bricks and rules. For otherwise it would be problematic. It would lead us to the danger of playing music without spirit, or the danger of “splitting hairs”, and coming to a dead end in practise, which also happens quite frequently for performers. One has to find one’s own way to connect with one’s intuition, one’s artistic self inside of practice. We thus will now exemplify what would make up an effective mode of practice.

#### **iv) Personalized liberation**

“In all general physical piano training a ‘concentration on relaxation’ was most essential”

<sup>132</sup>(p.24).

Wolff and Schnabel

For me, slow practise is the most comfortable mode. I am not worrying about how I sound, I also temporarily leave behind my judgment , I let the music come to me, all the nuances in music appear vividly to me. Slow practise is a process where I connect directly with my inner intuition for music. There I am free and comfortable.

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<sup>131</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.223

<sup>132</sup> Wolff and Schnabel. *Schnabel's Interpretation*, p. 24

But sometimes slow practise can be dangerous, and that is the reason some people don't promote slow-practising. Instead of getting the whole picture as I would through slow practice, one might get stuck inside little details, such as single notes instead of the entire lines. Slow practice breaks the original tempo of music, if one doesn't feel liberated, and at the same time alive together with this new impulse, it would do harm to their overall picture and sensation of the piece.

Sometimes, we see musicians think scales are unnecessary. For example, Martha Argerich thinks all technique has its own life according to the individuality of the piece.<sup>133</sup> There is no way for her to practise a generalized octaves skill and applying the same approach to the instrument at all octaves in different music. But for other musicians, exercises or scales can be practised musically. They can connect with their inner artistic self while practising scales. Both of these two sides avoid compulsive practising through slavery.

The path to liberation varies, whether playing scales or not, practising slowly or mind practise away from the instrument, if one can concentrate in practise with deep awareness for music, through breathing together with music, a trust in the physical gesture, a "concentration on relaxation" in Schnabel's words, then this would be one's personalized process within freedom.

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<sup>133</sup>Nicolas Bardey. "*Martha Argerich - Technique pianistique (1972)*". YouTube video, 01:00. Posted [September 2016] <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wD1rn-0ei9o>>.

## Conclusion

In this post-industrial age, the environment which we are in exposes us to the high risk of producing music as we would goods or materials. Therefore there is an even greater need for us to embrace the spirit of “creation” in music. Yet, many older musicians have criticized our generation of performers for its lack of originality, as we have seen through many quotations in this project. Horowitz thinks that this attitude of: “oh, I must not miss one passage” in reality comes from “recordings...from some machine...”.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Dubal, David. *Reflections*, p.205

As Bergson describes it, the mechanical approach of order is “automatic” and the vital order is “analogous to the order willed”. Thus physical order for machines is insufficient to ultimately illustrate the willed life, for it descends *élan vital* into mobility and materiality. These ideologies we think can inspire musicians on the topic of the essence of music, and thus can help them in the process of practise. Sometimes, it might seem that during the practising process, music can be broken down and divided up into little elements, like mathematical equations or geometric lines in order for musicians to master every single element of which it consists. It seems like temporarily, everything can be separated from music. Of all these things intelligence separated music into homogeneities, such as tools, rules, analyzations and conventions. They have well trained a performer’s inner critical self, but just as “calculation touches, at most, certain phenomena of organic *destructions...*”,<sup>135</sup> this critical self formed by a mathematical method is about destruction and denying. Although all the tools can serve to facilitate the process of working and learning, they do not participate in construction, in real creation. What’s more, if one focuses too much on tools, instead of making music, the performer risks losing herself among tools.

Essentially, even in the stage of studying and practising music, the solution to understanding the music as a whole is to rejoin the force that originates it, to rejoin the *élan vital*. It is this space that Kant would have called “outside of time and space”, that Bergson called duration, which is the vital force that creates the living organism. “We do not *think* real time”, as Bergson criticized Kant. “But we *live it*, because life transcends intellect”.<sup>136</sup> If a good musical performance is able to bring this vitality of music to life, then in the process of working or

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<sup>135</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.20

<sup>136</sup> Bergson and Mitchell. *Creative Evolution*, p.46

practising, it should also be done within a domain where musical energy and freedom is flowing through. As opposed to getting stuck in various materials like notes, rhythm, style or other elements.

We think proficiency for music is only meaningful if the performer is made alive through music making, this would mean that he or she puts vitality and real creation first, and is not dominated by the physical rules of others.

The world develops and changes rapidly nowadays. Instead of making the names of composers sacred by immobilizing them as statues, at the same time promotes proficiency which is based on flawlessness and perfection, which simultaneously makes the whole environment more mechanical, we think it is better to create one's own voice through new music if one is unable to commit to the workload of classical music, or doesn't have the passion to explore the *élan vital* inside all the rules. The rapid developments in our age should be more exciting, bringing us greater communication, interaction, ideas and inspirations that would allow us to create and embrace the *élan vital* from other cultures.

Of course all artworks need technical attention even when creating new genres, there also will be moments where one would be restricted physically in order to be free. Thus ultimately this process is the same for all art genres. If artists would remember that tools are only serving for liberation and *élan vital*, treasuring and listening to their inner artistic self and not let it become dominated, replaced by the critical self, then we would have more exciting performances, more diverse musical genres, more improvisations which have becomes more or less extinct in the classical music tradition, and overall, more musicians who are able to be completely alive, constantly in creation regardless of formal restrictions; Whom people might simply address as "genius".

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